■ Entertainment
A 'woman of courage, dignity'

■ World / A11
Cloned cat sells for $50,000

■ Lifestyle
The designer who loves women

■ Sports
Pacquiao, HBO agree on terms of rematch

■ Across / A17
Most powerful man in Subic port!

Mike A's wishes: unity, happiness, grandchild

By Gil Cabacungan Jr.

SATURN, with Venus in the Pleiades and another grandchild—this time—from only daughter Lei Teena another three Christmas wishes of Erap.

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

	2002	2003	2004
Happy	82%	77%	64%
Sad	3%	4%	10%
Neither	15%	20%	26%

Friday, December 24, 2004 ■ 28 pages / vol. 28 / no. 16 website: www.inq7.net

SHARE-A-CAROL
President Macapagal-Arroyo spreads the holiday cheer as she joins children in singing Christmas carols during a gift-giving affair held in Malacañang.

Christmas merry to 2/3 of Filipinos

Poll notes decrease in optimism

TIS SUPPOSED to be the season to be jolly, but fewer adult Filipinos are looking forward to a merry Christmas tomorrow than those in the two Christmases past, according to results of a survey by a private polling group.

Social Weather Stations said yesterday the proportion of Filipinos expecting a happy Christmas fell to 64 percent this year from 77 percent in 2003 and 82 percent in 2002.

The survey covered 1,200 respondents nationwide and was conducted from Nov. 23 to Dec. 2, 2004. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

SWS said 10 percent of the respondents were expecting a sad Christmas this year, up from 3 to 4 percent in 2002-2003, when the number of those who said that they were neither happy nor sad jumped to 26 percent from 20 percent in 2003 and 15 percent in 2002.

The polling group noted a decline in the proportion of Filipinos expecting a happy Christmas across all demographic groups since 2002.

The decline came in about half of the respondents (48 percent) said their quality of life worsened this year from a year ago. Nineteen percent said their quality of life improved, while the rest said it did not change.

Nevertheless, sociologist Randy David said was one of those Filipinos looking forward to a happy Christmas one-and-a-half "part is high".

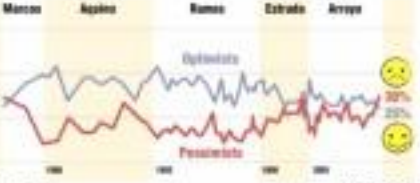
"I expected a much lower figure. Maybe, one out of three Filipinos dreading forward to a happy Christmas," he said.

Most Filipinos rejoice happiness with family and not monetary objects, according to David.

"Simple lang talaga ang kaligayahan ng mga Pilipino (Filipinos have very simple joys)," he said.

CONTINUED A-10

Expected change in quality of life
Apr 1984 - Dec 2004



Sandigan resets Erap departure for Dec. 26

By Armand N. Nocum

SURPRISING the prosecution's objections, the Sandiganbayan yesterday rescheduled on Sunday ousted President Joseph Estrada's date of departure for Hong Kong where he would undergo knee surgery.

Three justices of the five-member special fourth division division voting the plunder charges against Estrada approved a resolution allowing the deposed President to undergo medical treatment in Hong Kong from Dec. 26 to Feb. 25 next year.

Estrada, who was moved to Sandigan intensive care unit in 2002 and put on total bars that were initially get clearance from the Sandiganbayan to leave for Hong Kong on Dec. 19. He decided to forego his departure as he could attend on Sunday midnight the mass-singed services of actor Fernando Poe Jr., who lost to President Macapagal-Arroyo the May election.

Estrada, who has been placed

CONTINUED A-10

Guinness lists RP for mass aerobics

By Blanche S. Rivera

THE PHILIPPINES scored another spot in the Guinness Book of World Records in front of the world's largest aerobics demonstration.

After working the feat for more than a year, the Guinness Book of World Records has authenticated and recognized the mass exercise in the Quezon Memorial Circle in Manila on Feb. 15, 2003 as the world's biggest gathering for an aerobics class.

The class gathered 40,100 participants from governmental agencies, private companies and nongovernment organizations who came in early at 6 a.m. for the Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit, then exercised for about three hours.

Sophie Pfleiderer of the Guinness World Records Ltd. sent a letter dated Nov. 30 and a copy of the certificate to Dayrit stating that the Philippines led from "successful in setting (new) world record under the category of

CONTINUED A-10

Opposition senators mock oust-GMA plot

By Michael Lim Ubac, Lupe S. del Puerto and TJ Burgonio

OPPOSITION senators yesterday laughed off the claim of Senator Juanito Jun Ejercito that a plot to oust President Macapagal-Arroyo was in its implementation within 48 hours after the Wednesday ouster of Fernando Poe Jr.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said the only plot the opposition knew of was that in the North Cemetery where Poe was laid to rest.

To a pure layperson, it is a take-off from a Harry Potter plot and has no bearing with reality. It is a product of a feverish imagination," Pimentel said of the alleged planned civilian-military junta of which Poe's widow, Susan Roces, was supposedly to be installed as figurehead to replace Mrs. Arroyo.

Contacted for comment, Senator Ejercito (for Poe family's key media officer) was livid.

"What I have to say is this," Ejercito said on the phone. "If the administration and [its] security and intelligence forces are afraid

CONTINUED A-10

SUPPORTERS of Actor Fernando Poe Jr. find it difficult to bid goodbye as they shed a day after he is buried at the Manila North Cemetery on Tuesday.

Bishops urge prayers for abusive leaders 'who need true recovery'

By Blanche S. Rivera

JUST Christmas only a day away, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines is calling on the people to pray not only for the poor in materials but also for the spiritually bankrupt.

Unlike the families who were scattered homeless and impoverished by the recent storms, those who abuse their authority for the most who need true recovery, according to Fernando Capulla, CBCP president and archbishop of Davao.

"Our division showed concern within our already hurtful politics, and the sad tragedies unfolded by the killer Typhoons Winnie and Yoyong, strongly call for a rediscovery of the true meaning of Christmas," Capulla said in a Christmas message released by the CBCP.

"Our gift giving this year must focus on both the victims of disasters and calamities, and those who, by misusing and abusing their power, authority and influence, are morally impoverished and spiritually starved," he said.

Capulla, however, he said recovery of victims from Typhoons Christmas and Winnie, and among evils in government, and Christmas was a time to remember that everyone had a common origin and a common destiny.

"God the Creator became human, to save us so that his compassion destiny is possible. He demonstrated the possibility by showing us that giving unselfishly, especially oneself, without counting the cost ... is the most humane way of living in communion with God and others. This is the true meaning of Christmas," he said.

Capulla said it was imperative for all Filipinos to help one another, to promote a more humane society. He said there was still hope even for those who are in their graves.

"Because of the inherited good now in all of us, which is never canceled out by sin or crime, there is hope for their reform and redemption into our human and

CONTINUED A-10

Local body to decide payment for Naia-3 builders

A PHILIPPINE court-appointed commission will decide on compensation owed to a consortium, including Germany's Fraport AG, for a P600-million airport terminal built by the group but taken over by the government on Tuesday, Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza said yesterday.

Mendoza briefed reporters in Malacañang on the takeover of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3 (Naia-3) by the Philippine International Terminals Co., the consortium which built the terminal.

Fraport is 30 percent owned by Fraport, which operates Frankfurt airport.

Mendoza said the Department of Transportation and Communication (DOTC) "recognizes the right of Fraport for a just compensation and will do so after a competent court has determined its real market value."

But he also stressed that "the DOTC has to strike a balance between upholding the interest of investors and protecting national interest."

"In this particular case, the DOTC has reached the limit of its tolerance. The DOTC will not allow anybody to make the public a hostage," Mendoza said.

Mendoza hoped the new terminal at Manila's international airport would be operational within six months.

The government said Sunday that it expected the consortium to bid and offered a P4-billion ($71.57 million) down payment to Fraport in compensation.

But the consortium accused

CONTINUED A-10

A3
WEATHER FORECAST
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2004
Second FRONTPAGE

2 Pinoys among 69 hurt in Iraq bombing

TWO FILIPINOS were among the 69 people wounded in the blast on a US military base in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, the Foreign Affairs Department said Thursday as other Filipinos sought to leave the area.

The two Filipino civilian workers were wounded in the blast that killed 22 people at a US military dining hall. They are in stable condition and receiving care at a US military hospital, the department said in a statement.

In the wake of the blast, 20 of the Filipino civilian workers on the base asked to be repatriated and 14 have since been flown out to Adana, Turkey by a Turkish subcontractor. They will later be flown to Manila, the department said in a statement.

Separately, Labor Secretary Patricia Santo Tomas expressed optimism that a Filipino worker held hostage by Iraqi militants would be freed before year's end.

"Although I cannot discuss the finer points of the negotiations with the kidnappers, we are hoping that (the hostage Roberto) Tarongoy will be released before new year," Santo Tomas said.

Tarongoy, an accountant, was kidnapped along with an American, a Hungarian and three Iraqis on Dec 1.

The Filipino and Iraqis have since been freed but Tarongoy and the American have remained in captivity. AFP

Cops guard FPJ tomb at North Cemetery 24/7

To protect fans and deter vandals–WPD chief

By Leila B. Salaverria and Tarra V. Quismundo

SHOT AT the fans and supporters of Fernando Poe Jr have gone home, but police stand guard over the tomb of the actor who has gained iconic status after his death.

Western Police District Chief Supt. Pedro Bulaong said operatives had been assigned to the Manila North Cemetery in case there would be attempts to defile Poe's final resting place.

"There are policemen on watch 24 hours a day at the North Cemetery, especially since there was still a lot of fans visiting the king of Philippine movies," he said over radio station dzBB.

In a phone interview, Bulaong said the number of supporters who visited Poe's grave yesterday was much less than those who attended his burial. But the police he added, were not taking any chances and would still be monitoring the crowd.

Around a million people showed up for Poe's Dec. 22 burial, which was preceded by a 6.8-kilometer procession from the Dominique Church where the wake was held.

Bulaong said the WPD also wanted to protect Poe's supporters against anyone who would want to start trouble at the cemetery.

On the day of the actor's burial, several people reportedly lost their cell phones, wallets and bags. Police had earlier warned that thieves would probably take advantage of the huge crowds and rob mourners.

Bulaong added that the WPD wanted to make sure that no trouble would erupt in the 54-hectare cemetery which is also the final resting place of a number of past presidents and cultural icons.

Anticipating the large volume of traffic most likely would be left behind, some 1,110 PNP personnel and more managers were deployed to Manila's Department of Public Service on the day of Poe's coach-attended funeral.

Just enough, they left a total of trash—styrofoam food containers, plastic cups and paper—on the thoroughfares Poe's funeral march passed. But dozens of Esquire Brigade vested, the streets of A.H. Lacson and Dr. Mendiola, and within the Manila North Cemetery itself, according to Manila's DPS chief Rodolfo Mendoza.

A few hours after the rain had let out, the DPS started to clean up.

"We waited until most of the people had left the cemetery. We learned from 1-2 cooperatives," said Bermudez.

He estimated that a truckload of trash was collected inside the North Cemetery, and another truckload of garbage was picked up along the roads where the funeral procession had passed.

The cemetery added that 351 volunteers, also helped tidy up the cemetery, picking up the flowers and wreaths scattered in the Poe family.

Sorry, no bonus this year for 115,000 policemen

By Christine Y. Esguerra

SORRY boys no Christmas bonus this year.

During hard times, Philippine National Police Director General Edgar Aglipay broke the bad news to the PNP's 115,000 officers during a thanksgiving Mass at Camp Crame the other day.

In the past, policemen received a P5,000 Christmas bonus. But the decision caused the given this year because of the bad economic situation, Senior Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil, PNP spokesperson, said yesterday.

The announcement was anything but good news to police officers who had been given strict orders to refrain from Christmas "solicitations."

Aglipay then reminded the PNP's Christmas party and opted to donate the budget allocated for it to typhoon victims. But he threw a Christmas party for media people covering the PNP at his Camp Crame residence last Friday.

At the height of the financial crisis months ago, Aglipay urged his men to donate a day's salary to the national treasury. It is not clear what came out of this drive.

Instead of the Christmas bonus, Bataoil said the PNP leadership would hand out P2,400 in cash to each policeman representing his "medical support" for three quarters.

"We are hoping that the economy will improve next year so the PNP can give more benefits," he said.

Bataoil said the PNP was requesting to give more than its annual budget with the "institutionalized structural reforms" Aglipay had begun implementing in the corruption-prone procurement system.

The reforms got a boost from the government given by bishops and the Makati Business Club who joined the PNP in a "coalition against corruption" during rites at Camp Crame last Monday, the spokesperson said.

"With the reforms that we have been implementing, we hope to have more projects that will benefit our policemen," he said.

'BOOGIE TIME'

52 cops leave Pacer

By Christian V. Esguerra

AT LEAST 52 policemen left the Philippine National Police's anti-kidnapping group for another unit because they apparently didn't want to work under Senior Supt. Rodolfo "Boogie" Mendoza.

The officers of the Police Anti-Crime Emergency Response (Pacer) transferred to the National Anti-Smuggling Task Force days before Mendoza was designated its co-chief.

Mendoza yesterday confirmed the departure which he said had taken effect before he assumed office on Dec. 16.

"They sought permission to be transferred before I came," he said in a telephone interview.

Asked what might have driven the junior police men to leave, he said, "I have no record of being rejected by my men."

The department threatened to purge their ranks in a statement.

At the time of the exodus, the unit had not yet worked on cases that had taken place four days earlier, the incident learned.

Another case is that of Inocencio, now Secretary Sec, who was elevated by suspected Muslim gang members in Maidanao last year.

"Administratively, there are no issues or current situations," Mendoza said. "But I don't think our operations will be compromised. It all depends on the cooperation and deliberation of those who decided to stay."

He said he sees now requesting more policemen to fill the vacancies.

It was not clear what the 52 former Pacer men didn't like in particular about Mendoza, one of the Senior officials under the term of PNP chief Edgar Aglipay.

Mendoza got the coveted Boss post on top of his being deputy director of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG).

Oil firms cut gas prices by 30¢ to 35¢ per liter

By Abigail L. Ho

OIL FIRMS have pushed the pump-weary consumers but with one Christmas cheer. They reduced, on an average, gasoline prices from between 30 centavos and 35 centavos a liter.

Independent oil firm Unioil Petroleum Philippines announced a rollback of 35 centavos a liter on its gasoline products effective 12:01 a.m. yesterday.

Caltex (Philippines) Inc., another new oil player, followed suit at 12 noon yesterday with a 30 centavo-a-liter price reduction. Isaac Preciado, Caltex Philippines' media relations manager, said the company's decision to reduce prices at 12 p.m. yesterday.

The four biggest oil firms, Petron Corp., Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp., Caltex Philippines Inc. and Total (Philippines) Corp. all reduced the prices of their gasoline products by 30 centavos a liter at 12:01 a.m. today.

Officials of new player United Petroleum Philippines Inc. were still discussing a price cut as of press time. Should they decide on a rollback, it would likely take effect at 12 noon today.

The oil companies all cited improved world market conditions and competitive market forces as their reasons for the price cuts.

The benchmark Dubai crude fell to a Dec. 3 22 average of $34.39 a barrel from last month's $34.87.

The price of unleaded gasoline based on the Platts of Platts Singapore (MOPS) headcrack for refined petroleum products also declined to $45.39 a barrel this month, from $52.44 last month.

MOPS-based diesel fuel, while still registering a high price, also posted a lower price of $52.06 a barrel in the Dec. 1-22 period as compared with $56.92 in November.

Independent oil firm PTT Philippines Corp. cut prices of its gasoline and diesel fuel last week by 50 centavos a liter.

Earlier in the week, Petron, Shell, Caltex, Total and Petro Green Inc. also reduced prices of their cooking gas by P1 a kilogram or by P11 a cylinder.

Despite these price reductions, industry analysts agreed that it was still difficult to speculate on whether the downward in prices would continue, especially since price spikes in the world market usually occur in January and early February because of higher spending for heating in industrialized countries.

Gov't not giving up in Journal fight

By Dona Z. Pazybugan

THE GOVERNMENT is not about to give up the Philippine Journalists Inc. (PJI) without a fight.

The Presidential Commission on Good Government yesterday (tuesday) it would block what it called the "offer-out" by most of the newspaper publishing firm to alleged dummies of President Marcos's brothers-in-law, Benjamin "Kokoy" Romualdez.

It said the Sandiganbayan violated the government's right to due process when it carried out last Tuesday the Supreme Court Dec. 14 order to return the sequestered PJI to its former owners.

"The taking over of PJI management was without and legal notification of the constitutional guarantee of due process, as the control and management of 4 companies is vested by its duly-elected Board of Directors and Officers," the PCGG said in a statement.

"The order of the Supreme Court dated Dec. 14 was arbitrarily implemented by the Sandiganbayan on Dec. 21, without first hearing the solicitor general who filed his comment/opposition to the writ of immediate execution filed by former PJI majority stockholder Rosario Silvestre," the PCGG went on.

The PCGG said Sandiganbayan Associate Justice Minita "arbitrarily" served the writ of execution on Wednesday appointed PJI publisher Roberto Lopez Tuesday without first giving the PCGG, the Asset Privatization Trust and the Office of the Solicitor General a copy of the Sandiganbayan resolution ordering PJI's return to Cojuangco and their group.

The PCGG in 1986 sequestered PJI on the assertion that it was part of the ill-gotten wealth of Romualdez.

While the forfeiture case against Romualdez remains pending before the Sandiganbayan, PJI's shares of stock have since been turned over to the APT.

The high court has ordered the government to return PJI to its former owners as soon as they have paid the P32 million balance of PJI's government bonds back in 1977.

PJI shares of stock were used as collateral for the loan.

In its statement, the PCGG argued that the SC in effect condoned PJI's over P600 million outstanding loans, which according to the PCGG, the high court had no authority to do.

"The condonation of P643 million is not only unconscionable but an unlawful extinction of a debt to the impoverishment of government," said the PCGG.

CA paves way for court to assess genuineness of Marcos' last will

By TJ Burgonio

THE COURT of Appeals has junked before first lady Imelda Marcos' appeal to overturn a regional trial court's ruling in connection with the last will and testament of the late President Ferdinand Marcos.

The CA's Seventh Division, chaired by Associate Justice Portia Aliño-Hormachuelos, upheld the Jan. 11, 1996 order issued by the Hong Regional Trial Court allowing the late president's last will and testament to probate.

Probate refers to the process of proving before a tribunal the genuineness of a document offered for official recognition and registration as the last will and testament of a deceased person.

The appellate court ruled that the trial court's finding on the existence and due execution of the last will and testament should be upheld "in the absence of evidence that the last will and testament of decedent was destroyed..."

In her appeal, Mrs. Marcos had argued that the local court erred in approving the probate of her late husband's will, saying the government failed to present the original of the last will and testament (OLWT).

She had further argued there was legal presumption that her husband was destroyed to have revoked his will if the original could not be found after his death.

"If a party petitioning for the allowance of a will presents evidence that a will was indeed executed, the party opposing the probate cannot merely rely on such a presumption," the court said in its 19-page ruling.

Marcos, who was exiled to Hawaii after he was toppled from power by a people's revolt in February 1986, left a last will and testament when he died on Sept. 28, 1989, records showed.

The will, which was executed in Hawaii on June 23, 1998, named Imelda and son Ferdinand Jr. as executors. When he died, Marcos left pieces of property valued at $10 million, excluding the alleged ill-gotten wealth.

The government had filed a forfeiture case before the Sandiganbayan, seeking to recover P125 billion of Marcos' alleged ill-gotten wealth.

It later petitioned the local court in Pasig City to allow Marcos' last will and testament to probate if found to be valid and authentic.

The appellate court also disputed Mrs. Marcos' contention that the government has no personality to file a petition to allow the will to probate.

"The material and direct interest of petitioner Republic in the estate of the decedent at the time of the petition was filed on Oct. 16, 1992 in the form of claims for estate and income taxes has already been recognized in the case of Marcos II vs Court of Appeals," it said.

Images of pain haunt S. Leyte landslide victims

PADIAN, ISSAAC, Southern Leyte—Flora Amajen won't watch or listen to news about the flash floods that killed hundreds of people in Leyte.

"The images of pain we saw on TV and the reports we heard over the radio reminded us of the tragedy that devastated us a year ago ... We are ourselves in that Leyte devastation," said Amajen, village chief of Pisan on its Padian waterfront.

Amajen recalled how he was able to bring his family to safety at the nick of time before his house was swept by floodwaters.

On Dec. 19, 2003, more than 150 people were killed when mud and flood hit Barangay Pisan and crashed into the homes of sleeping people in Pisan on and in Barangays Punta in San Francisco and Poblacion 02 downtown.

The Leyte towns are on Panaon Island, which is connected to mainland Southern Leyte through the Liloan Bridge.

The Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) ruled out illegal logging as the cause of the landslide, saying the island had long been deforested.

Instead, MGB experts pointed to excessive rainfall, land movements and geological terrain as the culprits. Most sediment in flash muzzles of rain under normal conditions had loosened the earth and mud.

Panaon, once a forested area, was converted into an agriculture land. The redistributed lands were mostly planted with coconut trees, which could not hold earth unlike forest trees.

The island also has a "fractured" soil that allows rainwater to seep in and "lubricate" the underlying earth. When the area becomes saturated with water, the soil slides down.

Help and missed targets

With the influx of donors who wanted to help the victims, Governor Leticia Petilla formed Operation Bagong Buhay (OBP) on Jan. 1, 2004, a task force to oversee relief and rehabilitation efforts for the victims.

"What we wanted is to have a (complete) community for the victims, not only houses to live in," Lerias said.

But the OBP has been missing its targets.

Part of the plan is to rehabilitate the areas hit by landslides by covering them with concrete bunks made into floor and by planting 300,000 seedlings of different tree species to hold the soil wherever it rains.

So far, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has managed to plant only about 20,000 seedlings, or 10 percent of the target, which were dropped from Cessna.

The OBP also failed to meet its June 30 deadline to build four relocation sites in Anibo, Liloan; Barangay Central, San Francisco; and Pisan on and Esperanza in San Ricardo.

A few days into the anniversary of the tragedy, only a little less than 100 families have transferred to their new homes. Two hundred more have yet to be relocated.

The OBP has listed three reasons it failed to meet the June 30 deadline.

One was the difficulty of bringing in construction materials to the relocation sites due to bad roads caused by the landslides.

The OBP also had difficulty in acquiring the relocation sites, particularly in Anibo. Only 13 units of duplex houses were built in Anibo following the collapse of negotiations on the acquisition of an additional lot for the relocation site.

Pilar photo shows an unidentified body recovered from a landslide in Barangay Poblacion in Liloan, Southern Leyte.

The landowners jacked up the price from the agreed amount of P100,000 to P400,000 because they wanted a higher valuation of the property.

Liloan Mayor Maria Gleanne said the bureaucracy that floods had already been deposited as payment for the land. But after the negotiations collapsed, the provincial board initiated expropriation proceedings for the 50 remaining duplexes.

To the, only 28 families have been relocated. The remaining 100 families are living in their homes in Barangay Poblacion, where 35 people were buried alive in the landslide.

Ironically, the Anibo site was the first concerted effort of different levels of officers, civic and nongovernment organizations and the Diocese of Maasin, all members of the OBP volunteering to build houses in a series of "convictorial build" initiated by the provincial government.

Under the provincial build scheme, each department of the provincial government builds one house in the relocation site.

Ms. Gleanne includes Gov. Lilet—municipal mayor—often offers, said those released were very happy. The residents, she added, are into fishing and farming.

Far from work

Another reason the target was missed was the refusal of some families to leave their homes because the proposed relocation sites were far from their sources of livelihood.

The toughest resistance came from residents in San Ricardo, who say nearby Mahaba resorts and farmers and whose homes destroyed by the floods were near the sea and their farms.

The relocation site in Pisan on is about 1.5 km uphill from where they used to live. Esperanza, on the other hand, is 4 km from Pisan on.

They were not also happy that these were two relocation sites in San Ricardo.

Amajen said even San Ricardo Mayor Virginia Mejilar expressed the idea of separating her constituents from one another and from their place of birth.

"If they insist as relocated, they should find ways for us to be together again," Amajen said, quoting the mayor as telling provincial and Red Cross officials.

He said they sympathized with Mejia, who had one fully recovered from the loss of her husband, then Mayor Vicente Mejia, who was swept by floodwaters while trying to help children cross a bridge to safety.

"But the residents really need all to transfer to safer areas because every time it rains, we get—deadly scenes—in safer ground," said Amajen, adding that they have developed a fear of rain.

He said the relocation site put up by the Gawad sa Kalinga at Pisan on would only accommodate 100 houses for more than 200 families that need to be transferred.

More than 100 families more would have to be moved from their current location in Esperanza, which is being run by the Redemptorists of International Red Cross (IFRC). Both the CFC and the IFRC belong to the GSF.

Amajen said the PBRC gave them until this month to decide whether to need themselves of the relocation sites because to work on the village would end by then.

Happy to leave

But the residents of Punta have no qualms about leaving their houses.

The village was also worst hit in the landslides. Two landslides reduced Punta to debris, leaving more than 100 dead and missing. More than 300 houses were either damaged or destroyed.

The Philippine National Red Cross promised the relocation for the 97 houses in the relocation site in Central, San Francisco.

So far, 87 families have been transferred. The others were living with relatives while waiting for the completion of the 13 remaining houses.

Municipal social worker Lydia Tablo said the affected families didn't insist in relocation to Punta.

She said nobody from the village has gone to the office of Sol. Pilar commission him to work as security guards in the company headhouses in the landslide-ridden area. The firm says the contract to conclude the 20-km road that connects Liloan to San Ricardo.

Punta has become a ghost barangay. What the killer mudslide spared in the area has remained as it is. Houses were abandoned even if some of them are intact.

Amajen's wife Ruby Salvag complained that he had no more village to run because most of his constituents are now residents of Central.

Salvag, who now lives with his family at the relocation site, insists that the government will help them. "We hope we could rebuild our lives here," he said.

Tablo said Punta residents had resumed on farming and fishing and the United Nations Development Program even provided them with 40 fishing boats.

Also, however, said the families are worried of the rainwater that accumulates on a slope passing through their site.

She said things were running smoothly "except when they are really hard up, they ask me from us."

Although struggling to recover from the trauma, the people try to live normal lives in the relocation sites.

On the tragedy's first anniversary, the residents held Masses—the first one still be in Pisan on, then in Punta and in Mahaba.

But for Amajen, not much has changed since Dec. 19, except for the prospect of a new house.

"The government could only do so much. We have to move on our own or we would risk losing with our eyes open," he said. Ana Arnaldo, PDI Visayas Bureau

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THE DAILY GOSPEL

Friday, December 24, 2004
4th Week of Advent

1st Reading: 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8-11, 16
Gospel: Lk 1:67-79

Zechariah, filled with holy spirit, sang this canticle.
"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has come and redeemed his people.
He has raised up for us a victorious Savior
in the house of David his servant,
as he promised through his prophets of old,
and has come to our rescue
and shown the hand of our foe.
He has shown mercy to our fathers
and remembered his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to Abraham, our father,
to deliver us from the enemy
that we might serve him fearlessly
in holiness and righteousness
all the days of our lives.
And you, my child,
shall be called prophet of the Most High,
for you shall go before the Lord
to prepare the way for him
and enable his people to come to their salvation
when his servant no longer lives on earth.
This is the work of the mercy of our God,
who comes from on high as a rising sun
shining on those who live in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Commentary

Zechariah's great canticle is a song of praise. How refreshing we are to sphere praise creation! And there is no reason just behind his praise, as there often is in the Psalms: the Psalm that begins so beautifully, "Sing a new song to the Lord," says, no less than, "Let the praise of God be on their lips and a two-edged sword in their hand to deal out vengeance to the nations..." But in Zechariah there is none of this. There's no sword; only to him. He's thought are so loud as to the coils of the Prince of Peace.

Why not compose your own thanksgiving canticle this morning?—a whole-hearted expression of praise and thanks for all that has been? Recall providence over your life and your family; for the grace of Christ living in you; for the gift of penitence; for having been guided into the Way of Peace.

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METRO

SUERTRES 3 7 6
SIX DIGIT 4 6 9 2 4 6
EZ2 11 25
SUPERLOTTO 6/49 3 11 17 25 28 41
SWEEPSTAKES 4 8 8 7 4 5 0

Xmas not merry for judge

By Luige A. del Puerto

CHRISTMAS Day would be anything but merry for Judge Julia Reyes of the Pasig City Metropolitan Trial Court.

The Supreme Court, in an en banc decision, suspended Reyes on Dec. 14. The order, which came out Wednesday, was issued following complaints of abuse of power by Prosecutors Rosanna Reyes, branch stenographer Aris Hendricks, and clerk of court Timoteo Migriño.

Judge Reyes had sent all three court employees to jail in the last few weeks.

"The Court resolved, upon the recommendation of the Court Administrator, to preventively suspend Judge Julia R. Reyes as Presiding Judge of MTC, Branch 69, Pasig City, effective immediately and until further orders from this court," the one-page decision said.

And this month, Reyes ordered the police to arrest Prosecutor Reyes last Wednesday for indirect contempt of court. The prosecutor earned the judge's ire after failing to follow an order to submit the inquest cases against Mayumi Aquino, who was out on bail for allegedly gambling inside the court premises.

Prosecutor Reyes had failed to appear in court several times, but she said she was on the hospital at the time for a heart problem.

Hendricks was cited by the judge for refusing to obey an order.

Judge Reyes had also ordered the detention of a lawyer and a woman who she chose to be identified for contempt of court.

Reacting to the decision, the judge said: "I can't imagine I was suspended while there I have unresolved cases. I cannot rest."

She added that the suspension court had already struck out her name from the payroll.

HOT BATMAN'S NEMESIS
Children enjoy rides and play in the red 40-meter-tall penguin-shaped slide in the country's first Kinderseaside Festival (KSF), a mega-amusement, entertainment and pedestrian mall which is building a network in Manila for the protection of the ecosystem. The penguins are on display in the Roxas Place, Manila.

Number coding scheme lifted

Good, bad news on expressways

By Marjoue C. Ortiz and Charissa L. Batino

GOOD NEWS/Ortiz

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) said yesterday that the number coding scheme would be suspended today Dec. 27, 30 and 31.

"There were declared holidays and the number coding scheme is automatically suspended on such special days," said Angelito Vergel de Dios, executive director of the MMDA Traffic Operations Center.

Vergel de Dios cautioned motorists that they were expecting heavy traffic this afternoon until late evening because of people doing their last-minute shopping.

Although the roads may be less congested for the rest of the holidays, Vergel de Dios said traffic could be problematic around malls and markets.

On the South Luzon and North Luzon Expressways, toll collection will be briefly suspended, the Philippine National Construction Corp. (PNCC) announced yesterday.

PNCC said it would not collect fees from 10 p.m. of Dec. 24 until 6 a.m. of Dec. 26. The right-hour respite would be repeated on Dec. 31 to Jan. 1.

But that is where the good news ends.

Effective 6 a.m. of Jan. 1, the PNCC would be collecting higher toll fees along the SLEX.

The 9.81-km-long along the SLEX are unchanged until the Lopez-owned concessionaire completes the upgrade of the highway early next year.

The PNCC had sought a 25-centavo-per-kilometer hike in toll fees along the SLEX, but the Toll Regulatory Board only approved a 4-centavos per kilometer increase, which would raise fees to P1.60 from the current P1.56.

The PNCC said it wanted to increase the toll fee per kilometer along the SLEX to $1 centavos from the current 52 centavos per km.

At the same time, the toll-fee regulator allowed the PNCC Subsidiary Corp. to increase the toll fee along the Skyway by P20 and the NLEX Tollway Corp. to hike the rate by P5 effective Dec. 1.

"We are not happy with the increase in the TRB rates as it is very inefficient. We will ask them to reconsider," said PNCC chairperson Pastor Ramos in an exclusive interview.

PNCC spokesperson Gloria Darvin said the same can still operate also asked the TRB to allow the NLEX to raise the fee to 75 centavos per kilometer.

But the TRB said it would just wait for the petition of the Manila North Tollways Corp., the Lopez-led joint venture with the PNCC, which is set to take over operations from the NLEX in early 2005.

MNTC had said that P40 fees along the NLEX could go up by about 100 percent once it takes over the expressway to allow the private group to recover its $171 million investment and to pay its creditors.

"The agreement with the TRB was that we would reduce the toll income that you provided they would allow us to recover in 2006. We originally asked for 72 centavos but they asked us to adjust it to 52 centavos," noted Ramos.

The TRB said toll fees would go up by P30 along the Skyway and by P5 along Coastal Road for cars and buses. The resulting increases would double for buses and trucks and triple for large trucks and trailers.

Manila court junks suit vs Noli

By Tarra F. Quismundo

WHAT former Valenzuela gift to give the country's (No. 2 basis)?

Maybe this one that could change the order dated Dec. 20 from a Manila court dismissing a P100 million suit was filed against Vice President Noli de Castro.

The court on order dated Dec. 20, Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 26 Judge Wilfredo Reyes threw out a complaint against de Castro filed last May a month before the May elections for a case claiming to have been implicated in a crime in the former broadcaster in his television show, Magandang Gabi Bayan.

Rafael Ongkiko alleged his reputation was damaged when he was acquitted of the murder and kidnapping of his wife in January 2003. Had the civil suit against de Castro in April 11.

In his civil suit, Ongkiko sought a payback for what he had called a $80 claimed by De Castro. He former businessman alleged that a television episode aired in September 2000 by de Castro had put him in a bad light, and made it appear that he was the mastermind in the kidnapping and killing of his wife.

But Reyes said the case lacked factual and legal basis. Ongkiko accused his wife's kidnapping and murder, the court said, was based not on first episode of De Castro's program, but on evidence that the National Bureau of Investigation had gathered.

The court also said that the damage suit was filed too late, as the period allowed by law for such a case to be filed in court and he pursued him in a trial had lapsed five years ago.

Gift explodes, hurts doctor in Makati City

By Marjoue C. Ortiz

BE CAREFUL when you open the Christmas.

Joselito Barbosa, 42, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Alfelor Building, No. 116 1/2 Rand Ave., Barangay Centro, was hurt when a gift wrapped beside an pleated nylon band.

Police said an unidentified man delivered the gift.

A note on the box said, "Merry Christmas From Angel."

The unsuspecting doctor removed the wrapping and was using the tape when it blew up.

Police said the box contained two batteries, nails, electrical tape, circuit cards and a shortened black plastic container that had contained fireworks.

Because of the incident, a police official warned people against receiving gifts from unknown sources.

Only 2 firemen responded

By Nancy C. Carvajal

FIRE victims were enraged Wednesday night when only two firemen arrived with a leaky hose were the first to come to their call.

Gloria Basanta, owner of the gutted two-story duplex at 47 Camino St., Ayala Alabang Village, said her house could have been saved had the firemen responded promptly.

She claimed that a hose firemen and the firetruck driver from the City Fire Department were not working when they arrived at about 10:30 p.m. inside a room on the second floor of her house.

The blaze was sparked by an old television set that reportedly blew up after it was left on for a long time.

"Instead of rushing to put out the fire, the hose firemen took his own sweet time," Basanta said.

"There was no water or pressure [in the firetruck]," she added.

And when the firemen got water in the hose, little water came out because the hose was riddled with holes.

The arrival of volunteer firemen from the Ortigas Community did little to save Basanta's home, which by then was already gutted.

Later, Paralegal Eve marshal Leonidas Brion arrived at the scene. Witnesses said he argumentative drunk.

He was caught on video grappling by a television crew [illegible].

The fire was already under control when Brion, joking with volunteer firemen, burst into the firemen in a telephone conversation. Damage was put at P1.5 million.

Yesterday afternoon, fire also erupted at the Solid Laguna Plastics Corporation factory along the East Service Road in Sucat, Parañaque.

Investigators said the factory owned by a certain Edmundo Lerma reportedly lacking fire-fighting equipment.

METRO BRIEFS

Sad reunion

A POLICE officer and a shot dead in front of his children in Pasig City yesterday morning. PO3 Rosauro Antolin of the Central Police District was shot dead while he tried to pacify himself and his two children in front of the family's house. The children were present a gay friend who Pasig Boulevard, slapping him, called the unidentified gunman the dead colleague. Antolin was shot in the head and chest after he was dead by some of the suspects. Another one could come he was dead by grabbing her hair and pulling her to different parts of the body. The suspects took off with Antolin's firearm, a 9-mm caliber pistol. The victim's children found out about their father's death when they arrived at their grandmother's house. Suspects are still at large. (Ruth L. Abanes)

New LRT I sked

LRT Authority announced Wednesday that its Christmas operations from 5 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. while those going to Roosevelt, Dambana and Monumento will be open from 5 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. (Ruth L. Abanes)

Makati fireworks

MAKATI City government officials asked residents to attend a special unity on Dec. 31 at the corner of Ayala and Paseo de Roxas Avenues, Makati City.

Festivities will be capped with a fireworks display at 12 midnight. (Ruth L. Abanes and Community Relations Department head Amalia Salgado said the "Makati Shoe Sale Extravaganza" will feature 3 days of shopping.

Salgado said the activities will showcase Makati's creative talents in the arts, culture and sports.

Also scheduled are a Christmas concert by the Philippine Madrigal Singers, a Christmas tree lighting ceremony and a Christmas parade.

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Passport found

A PASSPORT belonging to Lina Montecillo was found at the Pila Carousel Shop, Makati Cinema Square on Dec. 22. The owner may claim the passport upon showing identification papers at the shop or call 894-7702.

Grand Opening

World bazaar festival

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10 AM to 12 Midnight*

World Trade Center Metro Manila

* Except: Dec. 24: 10 AM - 03 PM
Dec. 25: 12 NN - 12 MN

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Activities for Today

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3 pm JAMPOT

5 pm Elmo Music

7 - 8 pm Int'l.

"Amazing Stories ... A Funny Way Christmas"
"Meet the Penguin Live"
"Christmas Chalk-Creative & Hand Crafts Holder"
"Festive Music, Autobreeg, DJ

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• KIDDIE ACTIVITIES • SANTA TOURS

Don't miss your favorite TV shows!
Check out today's Inquirer TV Guide in the Entertainment section

FRIDAY
DECEMBER 31, 2004
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
A1
SPORTS

Pacquiao, HBO agree on terms of title rematch

THE ROAD to the much-anticipated rematch between Manny Pacquiao and Juan Manuel Marquez (left) has finally been smoothened by the contract signing with HBO.

By Recah Trinidad

AFTER GETTING solid assurances on his purse, Manny Pacquiao yesterday signed his contract to fight WBA/IBF featherweight champion Juan Manuel Marquez of Mexico again next February.

Pacquiao, the Ring Magazine featherweight champion, quibbled over the terms of an addendum to his earlier contract with international promoter Murad Muhammad pertaining to the rematch against Marquez, who escaped with a controversial split draw despite being dethroned three times by Pacquiao in their first fight in Las Vegas.

The rematch against Marquez was put in jeopardy this week after Pacquiao, as reported by broadcaster Ronnie Nathanielsz, declared to sign the new contract which stated that he would be paid $900,000 for a rematch against Marquez "or a bout against another credible opponent."

Pacquiao was displeased over what had happened when the promised $1.3 million live-to-fight with Morales last year was reduced to $700,000 after he ended up fighting Marquez last May.

Two-fight contract

The 167-ring hero had refused to sign the fight contract delivered by his business manager, Rod Nazareth, on October 6 (Friday) when Pacquiao celebrated his 26th birthday.

Pacquiao, however, felt assured yesterday following a change in terms on the two-fight contract.

The phrase "a bout against another credible opponent" has been changed to "a bout against an opponent acceptable to HBO."

This means that, if and when any of the two prospective Pacquiao opponents—Marquez and Morales...couldn't fight, HBO will decide on a credible opponent.

HBO directly pays the purses of the fighters to ensure such a payment.

"Everything has been clarified, and all parties—Pacquiao, HBO, Murad...agreed to the terms," Nathanielsz, who helped source the dwindling negotiations, told the INQUIRER.

The same contract stipulates that Pacquiao would be paid $1.750 million to fight Morales in July.

HBO Sports senior vice president Kery Davis said the clause "credible opponent" was to ensure that Pacquiao doesn't lose the date and the chance to fight someone else for the same purse.

Murad, who was in Manila recently, explained that only HBO would decide on whether or not the substitute opponent is acceptable.

What happened last year was, after Pacquiao had beaten Marco Antonio Barrera, the promised fight against Morales was suddenly scrapped.

Pacquiao was supposed to have received $1.3 million had he fought Morales.

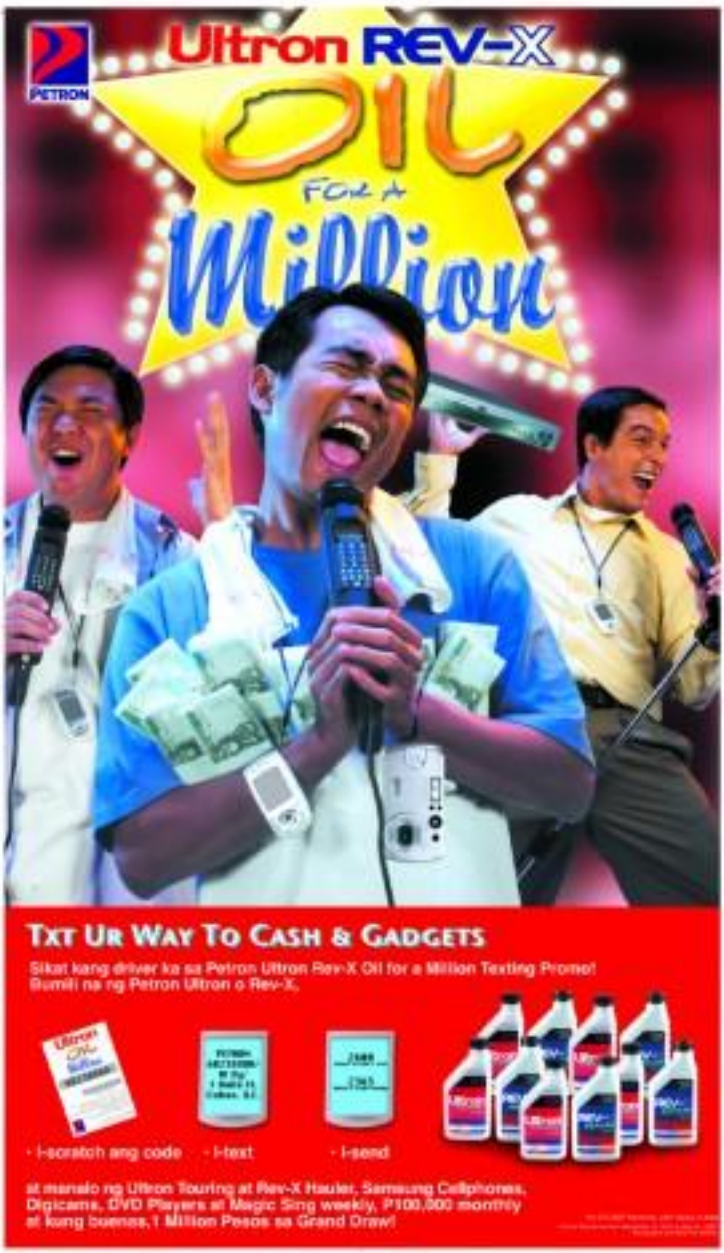
He was instead forced to fight Marquez and was paid a purse reduced by more than half.

To Murad's reckoning, Marquez was not a credible opponent.

Marquez, a superb counter-puncher and master craftsman, proved Murad wrong.

Pacquiao and the lost $900,000 only because of one man's strong opinion.

At least it's now HBO, holder of the moneybag, and not Murad which will decide whether or not Pacquiao's opponent is credible or not.



For grieving JDV, Christmas in hotel, New Year in Spain

By Cynthia D. Balana

SPEAKER Jose de Venecia Jr. and wife Gina will spend the New Year in Spain for a much-needed respite after losing their 20-year-old daughter JC in a fire which razed their house on Quezon Ave. in Diliman, Quezon City.

Mr. Kristian Celestine or JC, the couple's youngest child, was buried the other day.

Noel Albano, deputy secretary general for media affairs at the House of Representatives and spokesperson of De Venecia, said the family is final planned to visit Madrid and Barcelona even before the tragedy.

Joining the De Venecia couple on their trip are JC's brother Christopher, and Philip and Cristine—Gina's children from a previous marriage.

They however, will spend Christmas in the Shoa Hotel in Makati City where they have been temporarily staying since the fire gutted their two-story mansion on Magnolia Street in posh Bonanzaville Village where they lost most of their personal belongings.

Albano said the Speaker, who will celebrate his 68th birthday on Dec. 26, was still trying to pick up the pieces with the help of his extended family.

He said the family would return from Spain on Jan. 9 in time for the resumption of sessions of Congress the following day.

Yesterday, De Venecia went to a relative in Quezon City.

Albano said the Speaker had only one son left after the fire, which he had left in his house in Dasmariñas City.

De Venecia was also wearing a new pair of shoes given to him by Gina, a gift she received on marriage.

There was still no word if the De Venecias family would return to their Bonanzaville house after its renovation. There was also a need to determine if the house was still structurally sound.

The couple may have to seek a house for a while until they finish new home, Albano added.

Task force seizes 'hot logs' in Quezon town

THE DENR-CENRO of Environment and Natural Resources yesterday seized suspected "hot logs" worth P1.4 million hidden in areas occupied by in Mauban, Quezon.

The DENR's anti-illegal logging task force found the stockpile of processed wood in a bamboo-covered property in Barangay Palo. It is the biggest single find since the ruins was created by Secretary Michael Defensor on Dec. 8.

Retired Army Gen. Alfonso Dagohoy, the task force chief, said the confiscated wood were mostly "Red Lauan" species and lumbers, which could fill up three 10-wheeler and four-five trailer trucks.

The stacks of wood were camouflaged beneath bales and leaves when discovered at around 4 a.m. yesterday, Dagohoy said. No body has claimed the logs as of press time.

The seize planks, which have between 800 and 970 per board foot, totaled 18,000 board feet, while the lumber, which with at 9522 per board foot, totaled 7,700 board feet, Dagohoy said.

The task force was escorted by troopers from the Armed Forces' Southern Luzon command, which was formerly headed by Dagohoy.

The operation was the latest in a series of crack-down led by the DENR since Malacañang ordered a crackdown on illegal loggers recently. Dared for the massive flood devastation in Infanta, particularly areas that saw killer landslides during storm storms. Tobi Cuevas was

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness..."
John 1:4-5

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May the Peace of Christ fill our hearts this Christmas.

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Christmas merry to 2/3 of Filipinos

From page A1

said David, a sociology professor at the University of the Philippines.

Filipinos are happiest when they are with their family, though, "of course, they would like to have food on the table," he added.

David said the decrease in optimism from 80 percent in late 2003 and 77 percent in 2003 to only 64 percent this year was only to be expected, considering the decline of the economy.

"Next year, it will probably get worse because of rising inflation and unemployment," said David, who also serves a column for the Inquirer.

State of economy

Antonio Gardenfist, head of the think tank National Economic Applied Research Institute, said the survey results showed that "Filipinos have a sense of the general condition of the country."

"Call it gut feel, or an overall perception that all is not well," he said.

Though he agreed with David that the proportion of people optimistic about Christmas was still relatively high, Gardenfist said the downward trend was alarming "in a degree."

"Filipinos are a generally hopeful people. But it (SWS survey) says they are becoming less confident so," he said.

Gardenfist said the state of the economy was the single most important factor affecting Filipinos' optimism, or lack of it. The year has been characterized by widespread anxiety due to a series of bad price increases that pushed the cost of most basic goods and services up.

Other factors can also affect the people's outlook, Gardenfist said. Uncertainty about government is one example.

The poor and Christmas

In a statement, SWS said the number of people belonging to Classes D and E expecting a happy Christmas had fallen sharply.

Among those in Class D, 59 percent expect a merry Christmas, down from 76 percent in 2003 and 82 percent in 2002.

Of those in Class E, 68 percent expect a happy Christmas, compared with 75 percent in 2003 and 82 percent in 2002.

There was also a decline across the regions in the proportion of people expecting a jolly Christmas.

In Metro Manila, 46 percent of residents expect a merry Christmas, a sharp decline from 65 percent in 2003 and 77 percent in 2002.

The number of Metro Manileños, who were neither happy nor sad about Christmas, rose to 26 percent in 2004 from 20 percent in 2003 and 18 percent in 2002.

Pessimistic

People pessimistic of their prospects next year also outnumber those who are optimistic.

Thirty percent expect their quality of life to get worse, while only 20 percent expect their quality of life to improve next year.

Net optimism is so negative it's compared with positive 6 last August. It is negative 10 in Mindanao, negative 18 in Metro Manila, zero in the Visayas, and positive 6 in the rest of Luzon.

PIFS said the "dominance of pessimism is rare, and previously occurred only in March 2003 (the Iraq war), in September and October 2000 (Estrogate), and in 1984 (post-Aquino-assassination)."

The polling outfit said the survey questions on Christmas and the quality of life were not commissioned. *Amitt U. Sarmiento Jr. and DM. Research*

A PARAÑAQUE mother begs for money from motorists along Sucat Road in Quezon City.

Bishops urge . . .

From page A1

Christian community," he said, adding:

"This is the way to humanize our society and politics."

Bishops Lagdameo assigned Cayalla to draft a statement on the election framework that would allow the administration to reach out to opposition groups and other perceived long-time enemies of the government, including former first lady Imelda Marcos and business magnate Eduardo Cojuangco.

Cayalla had said in an earlier statement that he and Jesuit priest Bernas Intengan were holding consultations with people involved in reconciliation efforts.

Solidarity

In Malacañang, solidarity was also the central theme in President Macapagal-Arroyo's Christmas message.

"Now that Opposition standard-bearer Fernando Poe Jr. has been invited to run in dignity, it is time to bring back our solidarity behind the unity, peace and prosperity for the greatest number of Filipinos," Ms Arroyo's spokesperson, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, said in a statement.

"We were united in facing our problems and we succeeded because our motive is clear, the greater the use. Bagong Pilipinas is great and pure. This Christmas, I am grateful for your support and cooperation in my efforts to improve our standing," said Bunye, quoting the President.

The deep divisions in Philippine society appear to come to the fore during Poe's wake and funeral, with his friends and supporters, including deposed President Joseph Estrada, taking turns in assailing Ms Arroyo as the root of Erap's alleged ouster.

The jabbing could end the unity overtures on Christmas and the quality of life were not commissioned. *Amitt U. Sarmiento Jr. and DM. Research*

Sandigan resets Erap departure

From page A1

under house arrest at his villa in Tanay, Rizal, then asked the court to move his departure date to Dec. 27.

Chief Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio has opposed Estrada's departure, stating airports can be authorized bases and there is a risk Estrada could seek asylum or resort to legal means to avoid returning to face the charges of plunder, a nonbailable offense punishable by death.

The Gordenistas also asked the Supreme Court to issue compulsory restraining order against the Sandiganbayan amid revelations from those but Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson and private prosecutors that the anticipated court had succumbed to pressures from the Palace to allow Estrada to "escape."

Without waiting for the Supreme Court's action on the motion to act on the prosecution's opposition, the Sandiganbayan issued a resolution reserving the date of Estrada's departure to Dec. 28 when Estrada's American surgeon, Dr. Christopher Wilson, is expected to arrive in Hong Kong.

Estrada directed his lawyers to post a P1-million court bond on Thursday. Sandiganbayan spokesperson Jenner Jester said the money was expected by 4 p.m. on that gift from daughter Jinggoy Estrada-Lopez on her behalf.

Newly appointed Presiding Justice Teresita J. Leonardo-de Castro, a member of the special division, issued the order stating the Sandiganbayan court was "not aware of any temporary restraining order issued by the Supreme Court."

De Castro voted in favor of the resolution, along with Associate Justices Norberto de la Cruz and Teresita V. Diaz-Baldos.

Special division chair Edilberto Sandoval, who voted in favor of an earlier resolution allowing Estrada to travel abroad, dissented from issuing out the latest resolution. Associate Justice Francisco H. Villaruz Jr. opposed the new resolution, allowing Estrada 21 days of medical leave.

Dissenting opinion

In his dissenting opinion, Villaruz said his colleagues should have first sanctioned the decision of the Supreme Court on the prosecution's petition for certiorari that the Sandiganbayan refused to act on the departure date.

"It is not the departure dates alone that are at issue in the urgential proceeding but the main basic issue of whether this court committed grave abuse of discretion in allowing an accused, who is convicted because of charges involving the unthinkable offense of plunder, to travel abroad for a limited period to undergo knee replacement surgery," he said.

"The even deeper issue is the determination of the balance between the state's right to prosecute, on the one hand and detained accused's right, if any, to seek surgical treatment abroad, on the other," Villaruz added.

He said the latest Sandiganbayan resolution "will have the effect of the subordinate court arrogating a higher court on its powers of judicial review."

Pure so, Sandiganbayan Justice Ma. Teresita Leonardo-de Castro issued he kept in the hands of his Philippine police escort "at all times."

Singson reaction

Singson, who had exposed illegal gambling payoffs and tax kickbacks to Estrada that led to his downfall, believes that the former President is no longer going to return to the country.

Contacted through his mobile phone yesterday, Singson said he was "disappointed" by the Sandiganbayan's decision, but added he could no longer do anything about it.

"I have already done my part," he said of his efforts to stop Estrada's travel. "I hope that he returns as we can finally resolve the case and free him if innocent and punish him if he is guilty."

Estrada reaction

Estrada, speaking through spokesperson Mahagen Gloriani, lauded the Sandiganbayan decision as a "victory for justice tempered with compassion."

"The Sandiganbayan justices deserve our highest respect for ensuring our attempts to subvert what is essentially a legal process that must be decided in a court of law, not through media with the use of blunt propaganda," he said.

Estrada has already complied with the Sandiganbayan's legal requirements, including a pledge to return to the Philippines, his confinement at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital and his expression in writing his recognition of the court's jurisdiction.

Prosecutors allege that while in office, Estrada amassed about P600billion in illegal gambling payoffs, tax kickbacks and extortion money, stashed in secret bank accounts. Estrada has denied any wrongdoing.

Leniency

Earl Parreno, a political analyst, said the Arroyo administration had no choice but to act leniently toward Estrada to avoid the complications if he were to agitate for Fernando Poe Jr., a loser in 2004 (who nearly won the presidency) in a May election.

Ms Arroyo placed security forces on alert hours before Sandiganbayan announced its decision, with heavy armed troops and police escort "to all times."

Arroyo doesn't want conviction to be handed up and suddenly explode," Parreno said. "She has to appease the crowd that went to Poe's funeral."

Parreno said the government was trying to avoid perceptions that Estrada, an opposition icon, was being persecuted.

Estrada was allowed to attend Poe's all-night wake, where he broke down as he rendered the hymn of his best friend and gave a eulogy repeating opposition allegations that Arroyo's camp cheated in the election (but of course) in the election.

"We will overcome your fight, even if I die, just to fulfill your dream for our country and our people," Estrada said. *With reports from AP, AFP and Reuters*

A WORKER walks in front of the Adventist hospital in Hong Kong where deposed President Joseph Estrada will undergo knee surgery.

FIRST Gentleman Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo gathers rich and poor children in a "sharing" Christmas party in Malacañang.

Mike A's wishes . . .

From page A1

Gentleman Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo.

The First Gentleman hosted a "sharing session" for the Palace yesterday where he invited kids from small to be families to eat and share gifts with children of the poor.

Among the party girls was 3-year-old Alexis Marie Paz, son of four survivors from the collapsed Ifepador building in Real, Quezon.

He said he wanted rich children to be more generous by experiencing the joy of sharing.

Arroyo expressed his wish that "Filipinos be united so we could all be happy."

He said it was possible to unite the different social classes in the Philippines, much like when he invited children from wealthy families to interact and share their blessings with Datu "Shariff" Ampatuan's counterparts."

The children were treated to kaleidoscopes, paintings from the Free Gentleman, juices, hot dogs, pizza and cake. They were also entertained by mascots and received gift packs.

Arroyo also did not agree with the recent surveys that most Filipinos have become miserable because of the economic slump. He said the economy was enjoying tremendous growth and that the spinoff has more money to spend based on the thick crowds shopping in the malls.

He said the steep dive in her approval ratings and poor from the camps of the late Fernando Poe Jr., President Macapagal-Arroyo has little to be cheerful for.

The country has yet to heal from the wounds left by the ouster of President Joseph Estrada nearly four years ago and Mrs Arroyo has yet to earn the public's trust and support.

For this reason, "I wish her (the President) happiness this Christmas," Arroyo said.

The First Gentleman's third wish is to have more grandchildren, most especially from daughter Lely, who remains married and among her children.

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Ibarra

Suicide bomber seen behind Mosul carnage

MOSUL, Iraq—The deadliest attack on Americans in Iraq was probably the work of a suicide bomber who crashed a truck into a major US military base in Mosul, Washington's top general said on Wednesday.

"It looks like it was an improvised explosive device went by an attacker," Gen. Richard Myers, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters in Washington, ending 36 hours of confusion over who killed 18 Americans and four others in a mess tent at the Marez base in Sunni Mosul on Tuesday.

The admission, which gave credibility to a claim made by the Ansar al-Sunna militant group, has serious implications for US forces as they try to secure an election in the end of January.

On a day when a major US withdrawal pulled out of the country saying it was too dangerous, walking away from a $165-million contract to work on Iraq's damaged transport links, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld admitted it would be a "mistake" to expect to withdraw troops after elections on Jan. 30.

A US assault last month on the Sunni insurgent bastion of Falluja was intended to quell pre-election violence. But US commanders say many guerrilla leaders, including possibly al-Qaeda ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, scattered to places like Mosul.

Myers said only victory in a global US offensive against "extremists" could prevent a repeat of such attacks.

Casualty details relayed to an embassy-led town American civilian among the dead. Nineteen were US soldiers, four were American civilians and three were Iraqi National Guards. Another 60 people were wounded—a heavy toll for a single battle.

The blast site was peppered with wire, appeared to be fixed bearings, a US military spokesperson said Monday.

A US military statement said an explosive was found of a nearby attack, a more common cause of damage on US forces.

That an insurgent could enter one of the hardest targets in Iraq will shock many. But such lapses have growing numbers of Iraqi forces and other staff—vital to the US plan to hand security over in time in order to bring American troops home.

"The insurgency is going to get worse as we approach the elections," Rhode said, stressing the key role that would be played increasingly by Iraqi security forces.

Rumsfeld, who is already under fire by critics for failing to do enough to protect troops in the field, added: "Looking for a peaceful Iraq after the elections would be a mistake."

"We have had a suicide bomber apparently strap something to his body, apparently a bomb, and go into a dining hall. We know how difficult this is to prevent," he said.

"The way we prevent this is to win," Myers said. He compared Mosul to an earlier battleship Sept. 11, 2001, and the 1983 suicide truck bomb in Beirut that killed 241 US Marines—a massacre which contributed to a US decision to withdraw from Lebanon.

ABC television quoted unidentified sources saying troops in Mosul found documents last month referring to a "Beirut-style" attack. Ansar al-Sunna said one of its "martyrs" was the bomber. Reuters

Attack gives US serious dilemmas

By Alastair Macdonald

BAGHDAD—The US military's conclusion that a suicide bomber inside a US base was probably responsible for the deadliest strike on Americans in Iraq creates nightmare dilemmas for US forces.

Two months after twin suicide bombings struck at the heart of US political influence in Iraq, Baghdad's fortified Green Zone perimeter was breached, Tuesday's Mosul attack casts serious doubt on the ability of any compact base in a country where they face incessant dangers outside their fences.

With the recruitment of Iraqis to security forces and other jobs inside US camps seen as vital to an exit strategy from Iraq, for American soldiers, it could also seem unwise.

At first sight, many will be surprised that a man strapped with explosives could somehow gain access in broad daylight not just to the sprawling airfield complex that is Forward Operating Base Marez in Mosul but mess halls inside the more secure bases.

"In US bases are rotating multinational officer cadets from members of local security forces and Iraqi and foreign civilians mingle with American troops, using lockers canteens, sharing their shops and working with them as healthcare facilities.

"The sheer scale of movements in and out of these areas, however fortified they may appear with high walls, razor wire, watchtowers, mortar squads and helicopters, makes controlling who—and who—goes in and out virtually impossible.

"The chief logistics of life support for the American make it physically impossible to check everything," said a Pentagon security consultant in Iraq, declining to be identified.

It seems unlikely the suicide bomber, claimed as a "martyr" by the Ansar al-Sunna Islamist guerrilla group in northern Iraq, walked through security checks (Mosul) carrying explosives.

"You could bring (stuff in piece by piece, with different people," said another security expert, who works in Baghdad.

Detonation of an explosive device could be hidden and assembled in any one of a thousand places on a sprawling base.

Or any one of hundreds of people, probably local, working as cleaners, builders, house maintainers, or as police or National Guards, in these days some kind of unpleasant jacket, maybe even looking like murders' body armour and wander into the "three-half" at lunchtime would unleash fresh carnage. Reuters

SCULPTED FROM SNOW
A worker walks past the 88-meter-long snow sculptures, carved from about 7,000 cu. m. of snow, in Changchun, northeast China's Jilin province, Dec. 22. The sculptures, which organizers are claiming is the world's largest snow sculpture, is part of the attraction for a skiing festival during the Christmas season. AFP

EU court upholds Microsoft curbs

BRUSSELS—A European Union court Wednesday upheld product curbs and a record fine levied by the EU's executive commission against software giant Microsoft for abusing its market dominance.

Microsoft's share price tumbled in early New York trading but the firm took heart from a statement by the Court of First Instance, the EU's second highest tribunal, that it had a "prima facie" case against the European Commission.

"I remain optimistic that we will prevail at the end of this process," Brad Smith, chief legal counsel for Microsoft, told reporters in a conference call.

The commission, however, is hailed an overturn from Bill Gates' company to build fresh negotiations in a bid to reach an out-of-court settlement along the lines of a deal with US anti-trust authorities.

"The commission's decision of March 2004 stands. Therefore by definition we are not in the process of renegotiation," commission spokesperson Jonathan Todd told reporters.

"The court has confirmed that don't exist. It should be implemented immediately" he said.

Brussels imposed the fine of 497 million euros ($665 million) in March after finding that Microsoft had abused its overwhelming dominance to stifle competitors.

After a five-year investigation, it ruled that the company had to offer a European version of its Windows operating system without the Media Player utility, which allows access to audio and video content.

Microsoft was further ordered to provide competitors with the software interfaces code they need to enable their products to communicate with Windows.

The company received the Luxembourg-based court to suspend the remedies until the court could overturn really rule on its appeal against the entire commission ruling, which is likely to take at least 18 months.

But the court rejected Microsoft's argument that it would "suffer serious and irreparable damage" if the measures took immediate effect.

"Microsoft's application for interim measures is therefore dismissed in its entirety," it said.

However, the court added that Microsoft's case was "not at first sight unfounded and that the requirement that the applicant establish a prima facie case... is consequently satisfied."

The requirement to detach Media Player in particular strikes at the heart of Microsoft's business model, which involves tagging extra products onto Windows and monitoring the operating system as an all-in-one suite of applications.

Smith said the company intended to make a version available later Wednesday that will explain how rivals can obtain its interoperability information.

It will make a European version of a stripped-down Windows without Media Player available to computer manufacturers during January. It should be available for sale in February, the lawyer said. AFP

Yushchenko to supporters: Victory is near but more threats lie ahead

KIEV—Ukrainian opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko told thousands of orange-clad supporters that his victory is near, but he appealed to them to be ready to defend their win after Sunday's repeat presidential election.

With just three days remaining until the court-ordered rematch between Yushchenko and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, thousands of cheering supporters massed in Kiev's main square Wednesday to mark one month since the so-called "orange revolution" swept the country.

YUSHCHENKO during a speech at rally in central Kiev, Dec. 22. REUTERS

"The dawn have been opened. The only thing left for us is to step over the threshold," Yushchenko said during the open-air speech in freezing temperatures on Independence Square.

He warned of a plot to disrupt the voters, but did not say who was behind it.

"The vote on Dec. 26 will not be an easy political walk," he said. "There are some forces preparing to disrupt and they are preparing brigades, groups who are ready to go come to Kiev."

"We will come on this square, the stage, after the vote on Dec. 26 and will stay until our victory is celebrated," he said.

As he spoke the crowd—wearing orange armbands—waved orange banners and chanted "Yu-shchen-ko! Yu-shchen-ko!" A stage with orange Christmas trees was lit up, and the rap song that became synonymous with the earlier protests blasted from giant loudspeakers. A seven-meter high balloon resembling a giant orange was released to the ground in one side of the square.

Fears of violence have been high ahead of Sunday's runoff, with rumors swirling that pro-Yanukovich supporters are being given weapons and ordered to head to Kiev after the vote. Yanukovich's campaign staff has repeatedly denied the allegations.

The heated campaign has divided Ukraine between the pro-Yanukovich industrial, Russian-speaking east, and the west and central values Yushchenko draws his support. Some eastern regions had raised the possibility of pursuing secessionary if Yushchenko wins.

Ukrainians said they are wary, but many discounted the rumors. AP

Saudi expels Libya envoy over 'slay plot'

RIYADH — Saudi Arabia said on Wednesday it had recalled its ambassador from Libya and will expel the Libyan envoy in Riyadh over Tripoli's alleged role in a plot to assassinate Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz.

Libya expressed its surprise at the Saudi decision and called for the Arab League to launch an investigation into the affair.

"We have asked our ambassador in Africa to come [back] and are still [back] to assess relations after the [Libyan] ambassador takes leave," Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal told reporters.

The move was ordered to "free Libyan plot to whatever investigation was subjected," he said.

Details of the purported plot to assassinate Abdullah, in his capacity of the oil-rich kingdom, came to light earlier this year when an American Muslim activist pleaded guilty to illegal financial dealings with Libya and testified that he had been involved in a Libyan plan to kill the prince.

Twenty-six Armed servicemen in connection with a conspiracy, Saud al-Faisal said his country was not taking more retaliatory measures against Libya at the moment.

Despite the tightness of what happened, the kingdom continued to "treat its sister nation as ... as representative of the brotherly Libyan people, especially with the approach of the hajj season," he said, referring to the annual pilgrimage to Muslim holy sites in Saudi Arabia.

In comment from the Libyan foreign ministry expressed "its great surprise at the decision by [Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal] to the recalling of its ambassador to Libya... Nothing has happened between the two countries to justify this."

"If the recalling is linked to accusations concerning an assassination attempt against the Saudi crown prince, these have been denied and have been proven unfounded."

The statement said that the accusations were made "a long time ago, for why wasn't the ambassador recalled then?"

The statement called on "the Arab League secretary general to carry out an enquiry into this conspiracy affair in order to leave Arabers uncriticised" behind the decision.

The American Muslim, Abdurahman Alamoudi, was sentenced to 23 years in prison in Alexandria, Virginia, on October for illegal financial dealings with Libya.

According to court documents, Alamoudi, between November 1995 and September 2000, illegally transferred hundreds of thousands of dollars into the United States from Libya and other sources.

He made at least 10 trips to Libya and met with Libyan government officials.

During a March 11, 2003 meeting, Alamoudi and Libyan government officials allegedly discussed creating "broadcasters" and disruptions in Saudi Arabia. Alamoudi later learned that the actual objective was the assassination of the crown prince, according to US officials.

According to the affidavit, Alamoudi helped recruit participants for the plot by introducing the Libyans to two Saudi dissidents in London and facilitating the transfer of hundreds of thousands of dollars of cash from the Libyans to the dissidents to finance the plot.

Alamoudi was not charged in connection with the alleged plot.

Riyadh's decision to expel the Libyan envoy came one day after the United States announced it had put a leading London-based Saudi dissident, Saud al-Faqih, and another Saudian on its list of terrorist financiers and was asking the United Nations to sanction them as well.

The alleged Libyan order against Abdullah has been a sore point in an otherwise remarkable rapprochement between the United States and Libya since Tripoli agreed to a settlement in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing and renounced weapons of mass destruction last year.

Accounts of the purported plot first surfaced in June, when The New York Times reported that Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi tried to have Abdullah murdered last year.

Saudi state-guided media at the time credited the "aggressive" Gadhafi, whom Riyadh had helped oust the Lockerbie-imposed isolation.

Two Libyan men attempted to assault Saudi al-Faisal in Cairo in September 2003. The pair said they were trying to arrange a verbal duel on Gadhafi's rules was called a "foe" by Abdullah on ABC summit in Egypt in March last year.

The spat between the two leaders, broadcast live on television, came after Gadhafi charged that Riyadh was ready to "strike an alliance with the devil" to shield itself from friend-iraqi president Saddam Hussein. AFP

EMPEROR Akihito waving to well-wishers at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo Dec. 23. REUTER

Akihito laments 'heartbreaking' year on birthday

TOKYO — Japan's Emperor Akihito marked his 71st birthday Thursday with a somber address, reflecting on unhappy year which has seen the nation hit by natural disasters and controversies in the royal household.

"It has been a year with many heart-breaking events as natural disasters such as typhoons, torrential rains and earthquakes occurred in succession in various places," the monarch told well-wishers at the Imperial Palace.

At least 200 people perished in such disasters in Japan this year, the worst figure since 1983.

"I understand that [different things] have also happened to each and every one of you in the year. I wish you will take good care of yourself and the coming year will be a happy year for you," he read on through a public address system.

A crowd of 14,000 people gathered on a plaza in front of the Chowa Gotting palace pavilion, waving red-and-national flags and shouting "Tenno! Chuu Sou!

The emperor, flanked by Empress Michiko, Crown Prince Naruhito, Prince Akishino and his wife Princess Kiko, and Princess Sayako, appeared at the glassed-in balcony three times to the crowd.

Crown Prince Naruhito, a 41-year-old Harvard-educated former diplomat, was absent from the annual function as he is recuperating from a sprained ankle and elbow.

The Imperial Palace ground is opened to the public only twice a year for appearances of members of the world's longest-running monarchy. It also celebrates on Jan. 2 for New Year celebrations.

Emperor Akihito, in a birthday statement responding to written questions from media, expressed pain and confusion about the controversy over the crown princess.

Months fretted nearly all public duties a year ago due to worse mental pressure to produce a male heir to the throne. Her only child a 4-year-old Princess Aiko, who is a female cannot ascend the Chrysanthemum Throne.

Crown Prince Naruhito, 44, dropped a bombshell last May when he stated on a surprise conference to say that "developments" had created his wife unnecessary anxieties.

But his younger and only brother Prince Akishino, publicly chided him last month for taking his concerns to the media first, not the emperor.

The emperor said "There are still some things I have not fully understood yet" about the crown prince's complaint.

"It is regrettable that our respect for the independence of the crown prince and crown princess who maintain their own independent household made so [it] to receive these various problems," he said.

But the year has also seen the imperial family in a bright light as the emperor's only daughter Princess Sayako, 35, finally found a husband in the person of Tokyo municipal government official Yoshiki Kuroda, 39. AFP

SUE WINNER! Miss India World 2004 Sayali Bhagat greets an excited audience as she displays a creation by designer Tarun Paul during a fashion show in Calcutta, late Dec. 22. China and India will meet on the big winners when global trade quotas are abolished on Jan. 1, 2005, while the least developed countries will bear the brunt of the most painful adjustments, economists say. AFP

Taiwan a 'land mine' in Sino-US ties, says Armitage

TAIPEI... Taiwan played down on Thursday remarks by a senior US official who described the island as the biggest land mine in Sino-US ties and said Washington was not required to connect Taiwan's defense if attacked by China.

The comments by US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage raised more alarms in Taiwan that Washington may be loosening outright bulging in the bitter dispute between the mainland and the island China claims as a renegade province.

Premier Yu Shyi-kun said Foreign Minister Mark Chen tried to ease the anxiety, saying US policy was unchanged toward democratic Taiwan, which has aspirations for sovereignty but which China has said it will invade if it declares independence.

"Armitage was very clear. US policy toward Taiwan has not changed," the China Times quoted Yu as saying.

The United States broke off diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1979 and recognized China, but remains the island's biggest arms supplier and strongest ally with treaty obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act to help Taipei to defend itself.

Moreover, Armitage's remarks to the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) as the United States on Dec. 16, and picked up by Taiwan media this week, formed or a possible shift.

"We have the requirement with the Taiwan Relations Act to keep sufficient force in the Pacific to be able to deter attack, we are not required to defend," Armitage said, adding that it was up to the US Congress to decide if America should go to war.

US state department spokesperson Richard Boucher said on Wednesday Armitage had restated US policy in favorable terms.

Wary of being dragged by Taipei into a conflict with Beijing, a nuclear power, Washington has become increasingly concerned by what it sees as independence-leaning moves by the government of Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian.

Mixed with that concern is mounting frustration that Taiwan appears to be edged by resisting its US help to fund all China ...to the point that Taipei is dragging its feet over a huge $18 billion arms deal offered by Washington, analysts said.

Thus the United States has clarified its position in the past year, dropping some of the warnings ambiguity that had characterized diplomatic relations since China and Taiwan split at the end of a civil war in 1949.

For example, US Secretary of State Colin Powell said in October that Taiwan did not enjoy sovereignty as a nation and spoke of eventual reunification with China, departing from a longstanding US policy of taking no position on the outcome.

Armitage said he agreed with Beijing's "one China" policy, and analysts noted he used a stronger wording than his past "acknowledgment" of China's claim over Taiwan...

When asked where the land mines lie in US-China relations, Armitage told PBS: "I would say Taiwan. Taiwan is one. It's certainly the biggest."

"The United States hopes to manage the situation in the Taiwan Strait and how it is now out of control," said Lin Bih-jaw, professor of diplomacy at National Chengchi University. "It wants to avoid military confrontation and instead create..."

While Washington may be leaning toward China, looking to help on North Korea and other problems, the United States will still retain considerable leverage over the Taiwanese, Lin said.

"The United States wants to maintain the final decision-making power... They want to maintain some level of ambiguity, though it's clear the ambiguity is smaller and smaller," he said.

China claims sole governing Taiwan as part of its territory and has never ruled out the island uses towards statehood.

It is deeply suspicious of Chen's plans to adopt a new constitution by 2006, saying it is a move towards independence.

Still the Chinese parliament passed this weekend to debate an anti-secession law aimed at preventing Taiwan independence, analysts said Armitage's comments put more pressure on Taiwan President Chen to maintain the political status quo. Reuters

NINE-WEEK-OLD cat "Little Nicky" gets out of a cat carrying case, Dec. 23 in Texas. "Little Nicky," a successfully cloned cat, was sold by Jaffe to Genetic Savings and Clonaid for $50,000. AP

US firm sells cloned cat, spurs ethics debate

SAN FRANCISCO—The first cloned-to-order pet sold in the United States is named Little Nicky, a 9-month-old kitten delivered to a Texas woman celebrating the loss of a cat she had cloned for 17 years.

The kitten cost its owner $50,000 and was created from DNA from her beloved cat, named Nicky, who died last year.

"It is identical. The personality is the same," the owner, Jaffe, told cnn in a telephone interview. Although she agreed to be photographed with her cat, she asked that her last name and hometown not be disclosed because she said she fears losing to animal rights groups opposed to cloning.

Yet while Little Nicky, who was delivered two weeks ago, frolics in his new home, the kitten's creation and sale has re-ignited fierce ethical and scientific debate over cloning technology, which is rapidly advancing.

The company that created Little Nicky, Genetic Savings and Clone, said it hopes by May to have produced the world's first cloned dog—a racehorse has also reached fruition.

While it is based in the San Francisco Bay area, the company's cloning work will be done at its new lab in Madison, Wis.

Commercial interests already are cloning prized cows for about $20,000 each, and scientists have cloned mice, rabbits, goats, pigs, horses... and even the endangered banteng, a wild bull that is found mostly in Indonesia.

Several research teams around the world, meanwhile, are racing to create the first cloned monkey.

Aside from human cloning, which has been achieved only at the microscopic embryo stage, no cloning project has failed more dismally than the marketing plans of Genetic Savings and Clone.

"It's morally problematic and a little superfluous," said David Magnus, co-director of the Center for Biomedical Ethics at Stanford University. "For $50,000, she could have provided homes for a lot of strays."

Animals rights activists complain that sometimes production systems aren't needed because thousands of stray cats are euthanized each year for want of homes.

Lou Hawthorne, Genetic Savings and Clone's chief executive, said his company purchases thousands of ovaries from spay clinics across the country. It extracts the eggs, which are combined with the genetic material from the animals to be cloned. AP

Greetings!!!
In our efforts to extend our utmost service to those who might need it during the Holidays, we are happy to announce that we are still open for business on DEC. 26 till DEC. 30, 2004 (same time as usual).
So see you then! God Bless!!!
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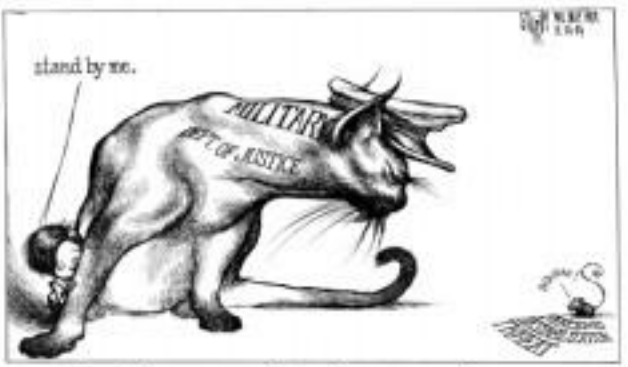

Banal Christmas

THOUGHT before midnight, Filipinos will flock to Catholic churches across the archipelago to attend the penultimate Mass ending the novenary of early dawn Masses that started last Dec. 16. Strictly speaking, the Mass is not penultimate because Catholics are still mandated to go to a Christmas Day Mass tomorrow. But the midnight Mass tonight is a credible finis to the nine-day run-up to the birth of Christ that remarkably parallels the long wait in the Old Testament for the birth of the Messiah.

EDITORIALS Of course, the preparation for Christmas started long way before with the Catholic liturgy's lighting of the Advent candle seventh last month. The lighting symbolizes many things, among them, the vigilant anticipation of Christians for the coming of Christ.

But Filipinos have long ago anticipated Christmas, since the onset of September when radios started filling the airwaves with the first Christmas carols, a case of Christmas overeagerness. A sort of anticipation that borders on obsession.

But Philippine Christmas takes its most distinctive form at the start of December when the streets and establishments are festooned with lights that have become more and more ingenious through the years. Offices and schools start elaborate gift-giving practices, aside from the predictable parties. Corporations play Santa Claus by showering goodies on depressed communities and marginalized sectors. Giving becomes institutionalized, at least for a month.

But the practices that characterize the Filipino Christmas have become so extensive that they seem commonplace and banal. Such is the power of the practices to insinuate and integrate themselves into the season that their import has been lost in the hurly-burly of the celebration.

Even the abstainers of Christmas is lost in the corporate do-goodism that has more and more become part of the bag of tricks of marketing men eager to always to confer business and corporate virtue in another form of grating hardsell. There seems to be no end to commerce's insatiable facility to debase Christmas.

Meaningful Christmas

AND yet this year seems a particularly meaningful Christmas for the Philippines. The month started propitiously enough with destructive typhoons that subsided and had spent a wide swath of the archipelago's southwestern region, displacing tens of thousands and killing hundreds. The death of the nine giant Zenaida tsunami has become such a fixture in the memory of Filipinos as if it, have cost a pall of gloom in a season that is otherwise determined to make merry and chase things up.

All these tragedies should compel us to reflect the meaning of the season and plumb its message and insights. This would require going beyond the tinsel and glitter of Christmas and reacquainting ourselves with its rituals that have become second nature to us, but which we have somehow transformed into rote in our eager rush to embrace commerce and materialism.

In the end, the meaning of Christmas is the same one that has been ingrained in us by the rituals and practices that the Spanish friar missionaries and the Church had in the past introduced and fostered in order to consolidate the faith. The practices are basically sacramental forms that symbolize and reflect in themselves the glory of God and God's fellowship with mankind in a world seemingly bereft of hope and virtuality. The genius of the Spanish missionaries was to integrate these practices into the lifestyle of the Filipinos so that they would seem to form a seamless weave in the larger tapestry of Filipino religiosity.

Nevertheless, there are not mere pious practices. If the sacraments guided the native Filipinos from birth to grave, it is the same with these practices: they accompany the Filipinos through the vagaries of existence, endowing their lives with meaning, relevance, love and hope. St. Thomas Aquinas, the great Dominican theologian and Doctor of the Church, has a phrase for it—"grace builds on nature."

Nowhere is the meaning of Christmas? We should go back to the lighting of the Advent candle. The practice is not a mere pious gesture. If the candle signifies and even anticipates hope, its lighting is a prophetic act. It means that we are committed to keeping the flame of hope alive in a world that seems determined to go back to darkness. It's an act of faith, and for the source of the Filipinos' many-sided struggles, a subversive and defiant one.

The old man and his Christmas lanterns

A GREAT Merry Christmas to everybody.

Over the years, readers would call me about columns of mine that they would like to read again. I would recall some of those pleasantries of the columnist—if I could still find them. The most requested piece is a Christmas column about an old man during my boyhood. Because I cannot find a copy of that article anymore, and it bears on the season, I must describe to you once more. Here it is:

When I was in primary school in the barrio of Tuwalan, Malolos, there was a small pond beside our four-room schoolhouse. Every year, during the rainy season, the pond flooded and we hooked some which we used to water our vegetable plots in the garden to the back of the school.

On the southeast of the other side of the pond, there was a small hut where an old man lived alone. A hard-packed path led through the water to the hut. During recess, we'd walk across this path to the hut. For the old man made lanterns, two-cornered jars for us from bamboo, glass and used fuel wicks from oil gave him a few centavos.

Toward Christmas, however, when the nights are usually so get chilly, he wouldn't make anything else but Christmas lanterns, the five-cornered ones, he told me—since they would have more light and a better chance of money selling them.

But no, he didn't sell them. Instead, he gave them away for free to his neighbors. His only condition to those who like their would keep them lighted at night during the whole Christmas season.

He gave the lanterns to all the houses that lined the watery paths that led to his hut. The neighborhood was bounding but four were easily the most far-flung. They were the ones during Christmastime. We would walk, at night just after school and through the neighborhood just to look at the old man's lanterns all lighted up. This old man's hut had the most lanterns, one on each of the four windows, another hanging over the doorway, and more over the path leading to the hut.

When all the houses had their lanterns, the old man would relay news of the day and way up the whole night. We could see him moving inside his window looking out as if waiting for somebody. This seems to me after year.

This was a curious behavior and nobody had any explanations. The old man, who was not a sailor, or else their place, did not suffer any sea sea. And nobody dared to ask him for any.

Until I was older and couldn't resist it anymore. I kept asking my old folks why he was doing it. But they had no satisfactory answers. "Why don't you ask him yourself?" they kept telling me. So one night I did.

One Christmas Eve, I wrapped some food from our table-dinner and took it to him. I found him looking out the window as usual, a kerosene lamp on the light of the lanterns. When he saw me approaching, he jumped from his chair and rushed down the steps and the path across the pond toward me. But when he recognized me, he stopped, as though disappointed.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "Salvador."

"I brought you some rice-cake bunos," I said, showing him the food. "It's Christmas."

"Oh, thank you. There's food in the house for a long time," he said. "Come up." He went back to the hut.

The old man took one rice-cake, put the food in them, placed them on the table and resumed the window chair.

Let's eat," he invited. "Merry Christmas."

I ate the food and drank the water I prepared the question. He paused a long time, thinking. Then he went to the kitchen to wash his hands.

When he came back and sat before me, he drew a deep sigh before speaking. "I am waiting for my son," he said.

"I didn't know you have a son," I said.

"I have one, the only child. My mother died when he was a baby," he said. "He's a young man now."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. He went away one day, said he would be back by Christmas. Many Christmas's have gone, but he has not returned."

"Where is he now?"

"Somewhere, with his friends. He belongs to an organization working for the people and for the country. But now, [illegible]. He said, "When we are successful, we will all be better off than we are."

"What organization? What are they doing?" I asked.

"I don't know. He was always away somewhere, working for us, he said. One day, he came home and packed his bags. "I am going away for a while, boy," he told me. But I will come back, soon for me. I will be back by Christmas. Wait for me. Then he was gone."

He sighed, looked long in the footpath lighted by the lanterns.

"This was many Christmases ago, but he has not yet come back," he continued. "Where is he? I'm so back to him. For many years, there were only the two of us together. I raised him since he was a child, just like my son. He is only a boy, you know," he sighed his face in his hands. "How he is gone."

"What was the organization your boss?"

"I think I know," he replied. "Some soldiers came here one day looking for him. I told them he was away. I don't know where."

"What about the lanterns?" I asked. "Why are you giving away so many of them?"

"They are to guide him back home, the will not remember his features. I am afraid he would lose his way in the dark. He has been away a long time, you know. The lanterns will show him the way back here. Come home, my son."

That conversation took place a long time ago. The old man is dead now. His hut is gone. The pond has been filled up, the schoolhouse was down and new houses now stand in their places.

But where is the son? Is he back? Did they finally get him? Or he still alive somewhere?

If he happens to read this, he will recognize his father, the old man who made Christmas lanterns to guide him home. He has somewhere on the small cemetery at the boundary of Bulihan and Tabon-san. Time has taken. My has been running by you.

Comments: e-mail pangalipayan@yahoo.com.ph

Remember, celebrate and believe

TOMORROW we celebrate the season of giving, in a world rent with its need of grace, recognized or else debased by misery. The season's "raising" we are constrained to be pregnant of the Poors and Temporibusb unpor- ta-ness—such is while everybody this was having their Christmas party—is but the home of the saving-verses. Are continue-ocean of the holidays. It is the Feast of Imbibles in Bad, Spurious, and the double of several people famous and unknown but all loved just as dearly by those they left behind. We strongly feel that is why we need Christmas: it is the season that reminds us that we are to be grateful despite The grateful harvest of Proverbs For it, for one, shows that there is a love not slight, it also can also show politics, this can politics is one of humanity the reasons that have little to do with contests for earthly power and all to do with pure unselfishness for God's people.

What is so compelling then about the promise of redemption? Aside what we continue to celebrate it 2,000 years later? Starting with the most genuine, it is a universal bond from the "necessary and obedient of God," which is how the Supreme Court described the mingling of public and private funds for a charity and explained why an otherwise religious celebration is actually secular in character.

The modern world recognizes diversity and advocates some sort of unity. Mr. Frampton was flipped, where he was enrolled in a public school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, wondering fairly learned his favorite "Christmas carol," "Joys the Bestlle," a Jewish song by Friendship's author does was confused. "Oh Come All Ye Faithful" that he other Americans sang and which Mary Lubelica in her term only to "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," the national anthem of all inspiring 1940s.

But secularization has its downsides. A part-time Christmas has its downsides. A part-time of shopping. The spirit of sharing and to Christmas, and we lose sight of what the Christmas would celebrates is the ultimate act

PASSION FOR REASON

Raul C. Pangalangan

of selflessness: the incarnation of the Christ, of the Word Made Flesh, when the Divine was made man, was born and lived among us.

Each time I steward the midnight Mass, and the priest says, "Behold, I bring you good news—no morning after in sight! I bring a guide to my love just thinking about it—I look around at all the crowd and things work around me. The grown-ups all caffeinated from their parties, the kids all wide awake no longer than the Sound is complete and the spirit all dressed and disposed for the occasion, with between sleeping and waiting for the opening of their gifts. And I often wonder did Jesus Christ actually want them to catch his flight?

Perhaps the Catholic ethos the message of Christmas really, seriously, he must be able to celebrate at all. He saved in the birth of a carpenter's son, we have many religious carpenters (we actually have three sons and daughters in the Supreme Court alone). Likewise, Jesus was born of a virgin, but we have had several miracle-ers.

Even more I stressed

Nightmare

ANALYSIS

Amando Doronila

WITH THE PRECIPITOUS ouster of Fernando Poe Jr., the Arroyo administration entered the worst nightmare of its first six months in office. The passing of Poe does not end the path for massive protest rallies in the new year. 2005 promises to be another year of rising political turbulence with the ghost of Poe's unsuccessful protest haunting the administration. Protest is the Presidential Electoral Tribunal will be the locus of the administration's worries. The fiscal deficit crisis is more ominous as the world listens to economic analysts.

The Filipino masses poured out their grief at the funeral, but the dire expectations did not materialize. The size of the funeral march disappointed the expectations of those seeking to trigger protests in the streets to force the hasty, much hated of Benigno Aquino Jr., which drove, according to two assistants, more than a million people.

The major news agencies, which set store on hyperbole about exaggerated claims of crowd movement, placed the crowd between "tens of thousands" and 200,000. Thus, Aquino's funeral still holds the record nonetheless. The crowd estimates of the police and military, which are skeptical of movements in the political election rallies and people power demonstrations of before.

The theatre can use of inspiration to describe the Catholic funeral rites for Poe. Cardinal Sin lifted up the figures and described the assemblage as the world's living saints and the funeral rites seemed mostly a love-affair ritual: "unparalleled in history," Senior Supreme, a lawyer whose professional success is largely attributed to his close friendship with the late Chief Justice Marcelo Fernan, said. "That is a powerful political statement. This is the most decisive protest, not filed one in the Supreme Court. The supporting is incredible."

Alas, it takes more than crowd estimates to determine to make a case that Poe was allegedly massively cheated in the May elections.

The administration took its chances and, indeed displayed invulnerability immunity amidst Malacañang, rejecting the worst—that is, the funeral might be used by revolutionaries to whip up the emotions of the crowd to storm Malacañang. The administration must have learned one lesson from the May 1, 2001 mob attack. It is not stupid to set on the side of over-preparation than to be caught by surprise. The "Poe-Spence" telecommunications received by Junior Secretary Raul Gonzalez revealed that some conspirators let people had plotted to create the highly emotional crowd to go on a rampage, or to storm the area for some military place. The administration's defense from the government, similar to the January 2001 economy, triggering a total collapse of military support for the regime. Congressman Barzaga did not die with Poe, but provided more than one vote to the impeachment trials are not wanting of parties who would want to keep it alive. Similarly, there should be no want of lawyers willing to take up new cudgels for Erap from those who might furnish from the pockets of the priests.

The scenario of the so-called "plot" exposed by Gonzalez called for the formation of a junta, in the event that it succeeded in ousting the Arroyo regime—with Poe's widow, Susan Roces, installed as a "front" president by a shadowy group. The scenario is imaginative and points some of Filipino leaders involving violence of popular political by using fighting forces of the Philippine National Police. Cory Aquino in place of Sen. Benigno Aquino; Manuelita Asuncion for Sen. Estefania Asuncion who died in a helicopter crash. According to Philippine political culture, widowhood becomes a source of currency in political affairs, as through it gives widows a distinct right to rule. It attracts sympathy.

The nightmare looming ahead of President Macapagal-Arroyo are heavy portents (choices) in the first months of her term. Her decisions on economic issues will be made in the shadow of the elevated protests, and the decisions on economic issues will be made in the shadow of the elevated protests, and the decisions on economic issues will be made in the shadow of the elevated protests, and the

Useless debate on logging

I DON'T get it. Some kind of panic, threat or frustration on logging has always been in place though never really enforced. We know, of course, that this is due to corruption. Why then are Malacañang and Congress wasting time debating on what to what or what not to?

Shouldn't Malacañang and Congress be debating on how to end corruption instead? What's the use of new laws when they cannot be enforced because of corruption? I really don't get it, Mahalaklak.

Take for instance the alleged illegal logging operations in Quezon Province. Why not just send investigators there to determine what has been going on and who are involved? Once it is determined that there was indeed illegal logging there, appropriate charges should be filed against the guilty parties.

In fact, sending investigators to Quezon does not even be necessary. Illegal logging operations can cost 100 plus without the consent—or at least the connivance—of the barangay chairman, governor, police division, military commander and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. (The Save People's Army, being an outlaw, cannot be expected to endorse the law.) Maliwalong and Congress can call those people and demand an explanation. A case of non-feasance, at the least, can be filed against them.

It would be fun watching them do so TV and in Congress. It'll be become boring. The same cycle of pretension: Asphalt day 11, day one...Let's have more news about several action circles in the Iraq insurgency!

By the way in Cavite, Davao Oriental, there is also illegal logging. May we request Malacañang and Congress to also call the local officials, police division, military commander and DENR officials there? Just a request.

—ELCE D'ANADDUBLAAK, Marso City

Enough with 'trapos'

HARD who will be the next opposition leader after the unexpected death of Fernando Poe Jr., Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile could only stumble. Usher a long pause) the name of your favorite Filipino statesman who is himself barely able to defend himself against the various crimes he (Enrile) is accused of. It was a

GMA and Ramadan

IT becomes me that there are people who are quick in heaping criticisms but malign when it comes to giving praises.

Our President did right in proclaiming the last day of the Ramadan—a holy day for Muslims—as a national holiday. A segment of our nation is composed of Muslims.

By this act, she showed her respect for our Muslim brothers and their traditions. Perhaps, she did this to make amends for her ill-advised decision to join the unjust war of the United States against Iraq.

—BENJAMIN C. DE LA FUENTE, 1838 Mamonsito St., Sta. Cruz, Manila

LETTERS

Chain saws regulated

THE INQUIRER recently published a letter from a reader suggesting the regulation of the use and possession of chain saws (PDI, 12/16/04). My environmental group, Green Republic Act No. 9175 already provides for this, specifically:

"Sec. 7. Penal Provisions. (1) Selling, Distributing, Re-selling, Transferring, Distributing or Possessing a Chain Saw Without a Proper Permit. Any person who sells, purchases, transfers the ownership, distributes or otherwise disposes or possesses a chain saw without first securing the necessary permit from the Department shall be punished with imprisonment of four (4) years, one (1) month and one (1) day to six (6) years or a fine of not less than Fifteen thousand pesos (P15,000.00) but not more thirty thousand pesos (30,000.00) or both at the discretion of the court, and the chain saw(s) confiscated in favor of the government."

The act also contains additional and more severe penal provisions for actual unlawful use of a chain saw.

—BEN MENDIOLA, ben.mendiola@yahoo.com

Face-saving political gimmickry

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo's suspension of all logging permits appears to be a face-saving political gimmick, not an honest-to-goodness move to protect the fragile environment.

Barely a week before the calamity, the forces was leading the Supreme Court's rules that declarations governing commercial cutting of mangroves, legal members can engage in the large-scale planting of tree mineral resources.

The government says that existing will bring forth a barrier like the past. That is belied by the experiences of many adherents communities that have seen existing cause ecological degradation, displacement of indigenous peoples, greater suffering and deprivation and environmental havoc. The recently concluded Bantaoren industry Review (EIR) commissioned by the World Bank was, for two that mining contributed to present poverty rather than caused it.

The argument citing "sound mining practices" is just propaganda as the mining industry continues to inflict devastation on communities and the environment. The new events represent damage to the poisoning of Boyal Bay in Davao, the site of a submarine tailing disposal. And we have no forget the mining disaster in Marinduque, where mine tailings continue to poison people. If we the unscrupulous logging operations, what do we call the mining firm that threatened the survival of the people of this heritage?

The government's suspension of environmental rigging while a protective large-scale mining is simply inconsistent and utterly ridiculous. The need to keep our natural policies on environmental protection commences but because all that is necessary in the face of recent calamities.

We, as Oriental Mindoro, express our opposition to the mining operations in our watershed. We call on the relentless force of the Church and civil society to join the struggle of our people against the far graver threat of mining disasters posed by the Supreme Court's pro-mining decision and the Arroyo administration's aggressive pro-mining policies. Indeed, true many have said is suffer devastation before we come to our senses?

—FR. EDMUND A. CAMUDDU, Mangyan Mission, St. Augustine Seminary, Dulasan, Sagunay City

On the outburst of Susan Roces

SUSAN, may you stay strong and keep your dignity, and please remain with the people who believed in your husband, for people like Fr. Chard in his remarks that you made about MIS-CHIEF of the election deserves to get it from me.

Ahh Ohh, you should to flat and honor with the Filipino people. I hope you would come to realize that the day might come that nobody would patronize your names anymore.—May Cañarda, 47 dec. 8, 10 SY

VOICES ON INQ7.NET

I can understand the grief of Susan Roces. But she should have also considered that when her husband entered politics, he became public property and as such he was bound to present his ideas on how to solve the problems of the country. But he chose to remain silent and left it to his advisers to talk on the issues. Roces must face the music and be happy that some moviegoers and other politicians supported her husband.—Ani Francisco, Los Angeles, USA

The remonstrance of Susan Roces and sister Pet Impalian about politics and the TV stations revealed their true character. They have been shown to be power hungry individuals who want to use free but their personal and political interests.—Ray Sanano, Dallas, TX, USA

I wanted my condolences to Susan Roces. But I want to share my thoughts on her statement denying any plan to enter politics. What she said sounded like fighting words (in the political arena) as she. Sen. Nadia Lacson and also said in one side that he has heard no personal ambitions about going into politics. Look where he is now.

Give Susan a few years from now and she will change her color. She will indeed run, using her husband's political platform. She might have said this as well: "There's a time for everything. Now is not the right time."—Elmer Sidorosa, Sukhumvit Soi 8, Bangkok, Thailand

I am not an avid fan of President Macapagal-Arroyo. Neither am I a die-hard fan of Fpe and Susan Roces. But Roces' hatred of the administration is exaggerated and too personal. The comments buried on Fpe during the electoral campaign were part of the political game and should never be taken too personally.

Leave the buried buried with Fpe and let his grievous crime for the sake of its manner who are always used as sacrificial lambs.

Think Mr Roces, politics and there lie have manufactured my beloved country into a den of thieves. It's shameful to live in the Philippines where mass media political always predominating on TV. But it's always a pride for me to be a true Filipino who loves my country more than you and she hopes do.—El Verdi, Shakespeare Area, Phase 1, P.O. Box 2142, Jeddah 21451, KSA

Why does she (Roces) remain one over Fpe's losing the May elections until now? It was not the fault of the administration that Fpe died. And the cause of his death was not politics or politics-related. It was God's will. With her outburst, she projected an ugly image of herself such that, instead of feeling sad for her, people felt disappointed with her. She's not letting go of bitterness and anger in her body.—Sylvia Ilustre Cosme, California, USA

I understand that Susan Roces is grieving over the loss of Fpe, her beloved husband. But she has a very poor appreciation of what is going on in the real world. She sounded like she's blaming her enemies—who are they and for what? She should realize that circumstances do change in politics and there, one doesn't have a choice.—George Torres, 39 Caloocan Elm, Kamuning Way, Quezon City 1411 QUE

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All letters of letters to the editor are requested to include their complete address and telephone or pager number or e-mail address for verification purposes. The Inquirer will not publish any letter unless such information is supplied.

bagBox

Question of the Week

What are your hopes and dreams for your family this Christmas and the New Year!

Senders of a first (& last) published Tuesday's bagBox will each receive an "Inquirer T-shirt"!

Across the NATION

Forest protection budget too small

P4 per hectare per year allotted vs illegal logging

SORSOGON CITY—An environmental group expressed fears the government would lose its battle against rampant tree-cutting in Sorsogon province with its measly budget of P4 per hectare per year for its campaign to save the country's forests, or whatever is left of them.

The Sorsogon Provincial Multi-Sectoral Forest Protection Committee made the statement after getting a lowdown on the department of Environment and Natural Resources which revealed how much the government spends in its drive to save the remaining forests in the province.

Rene Custodio, community environment and natural resources officer, said the government was spending a pittance on its campaign against illegal cutting of trees, making it too difficult for them to contain the threat.

The competition, he said, was based on the salaries of the forest guards employed by the government with the amount allocated for maintenance and funds for other operating expenses being used for the anti-illegal logging campaign.

Custodio disclosed that as forest guards, making it virtually impossible for them to wage an effective campaign against illegal tree cutters.

Mindanao

The ideal ratio is one forest guard for every 500 hectares.

Sorsogon has 30,000 hectares of forest lands but it only has five forest guards, one of whom is a disabled man and who is not receiving allowance.

Aside from the lack of personnel, the DENR here also suffers from lack of mobility with only one rundown vehicle available, which is not much to the area and the roads being used by transporters of illegally-cut lumber.

Oliver Dominguez, provincial environment and natural resources officer, admitted that the DENR was really having a hard time apprehending illegal lumber dealers and the other workers in these are beyond their "control" powers.

Dominguez said they have to secure first a search warrant before they could get into the premises of illegal lumber dealers and furniture makers to confiscate their lumber.

Such process is considered tedious by DENR personnel and sometime discourages them from pursuing those involved in the illegal lumber trade.

There are also no DENR personnel who could conduct regular patrols along the roads believed to be used by illegal loggers in the province.

He also assured that Sorsogon would lucky as it still has sufficient forest cover, though the forests are mostly second growth and immature.

He said most pieces of lumber being sold in the province are being taken from private lands, which have Special Private Land Timber Permits (SPLTPs) or Private Land Timber Permits (PLTPs).

Dominguez, however, admitted that he follows process in applying for SPLTPs and PLTPs as well as the high fees being paid for by applicants for the purpose are discouraging landowners from seeking them.

He said applicants pay P1,000 per cubic meter for premium species, P500 for non-premium species.

Aside from that fees, the applicant also has to secure a certification from the Sorsogon various where the trees are located, attesting that new trees have been planted for the ones to replenished.

Tedious process

He also has to secure a certification from the mayor that he has no objection to the cutting, and from the governor, a certificate permission to cut the trees.

Dominguez said the process ensures that local officials are fully aware of the cutting of trees in their area and the DENR alone should not be blamed should illegal logging continue. Bobby Lobaton, PIA Southern Luzon Bureau

A WOMAN in Infanta, Quezon prepares for the holiday despite the tragedy that befell her town and other areas in Quezon and Aurora provinces that were hit by successive typhoons.

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Peace panels meet quietly in Malaysia

CEDARAFU CITY—Negotiators from the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) quietly met in Kuala Lumpur on Monday (during which both sides agreed) to resume the stalled formal peace negotiations as soon as possible, a rebel official said yesterday.

"Formal talks, stalled since middle of last year, are supposed to resume in January," Ghazali Jaafar, MILF political affairs chief, said.

During the meeting, the sixth of the exploratory talks, the panels, headed by chief government negotiator Silvestre Afable and MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal, discussed one of the outstanding issues in the path to peace in Mindanao.

In commission, Madaya Bobby Alonto, a member of the MILF peace panel, said the parties agreed to move forward "to remove some thorny issues that hindered the resumption of (the) stalled formal peace negotiations."

Alonto, describing the recent peace talks as progressive, said that a number of substantial issues have been resolved during the recent exploratory talks.

"On top of the agenda was the Ancestral Domain Aspect of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2000," which the parties recognized, Alonto said.

Alonto said the parties also agreed to activate their respective technical committees and subdivided these into four technical working groups (TWG) to meet and drum up working papers on the following components: Concept of Ancestral Domain; Territory, Governance, and Resources.

Afable and Iqbal, he said, also adopted a set of interim guidelines to "isolate and neutralize criminal groups and syndicates" in Mindanao.

Alonto said it was a significant step in the panels' joint efforts to immediately put in operation the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG).

The AHJAG would formalize the active participation of MILF fighters in running after lawless elements in the guerrillas' area of operation in Mindanao.

Mindanao's and the military have repeatedly accused the MILF of providing sanctuaries to operatives of the Jemaah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf.

The peace negotiators also acted favorably on the non-government organizations' desire for an observer status in the peace negotiations, according to Jaafar.

He said the guidelines governing the accreditation, participation and conduct of observers during the formal peace talks have also been adopted.

During the recent exploratory talks, the government and MILF peace panels acknowledged the significant contributions of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in the enforcement of an agreement to cease hostilities in Mindanao.

The appreciation was particularly extended to the leaders of Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Libya for sending in peacekeepers "because it really helped prevent clashes." Edwin Fernandez, PDI Mindanao Bureau

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS
The colors of the holiday season start to fill the night sky on President Aeroun in Clark, Pampanga as balloons of different sizes and shapes are put out to cheer residents and visitors.

Bishop tells troops, rebels: Give us peaceful Xmas

BACOLOD CITY—Shocked Bishop Vicente Navarra has called on the government and rebel forces not to violate their holiday ceasefire, and give everyone a peaceful Christmas.

"As we celebrate the birth of Christ, I appeal to all to respect human lives and veer away from violent encounters," Navarra said on Wednesday.

The appeal came three days after a soldier and two rebels were killed in a clash on Monday between government forces and members of the New People's Army (NPA) in Isabela town, Negros Occidental.

Six soldiers were also wounded during the exchange of gunfire, which lasted for two hours. The military claimed that the encounter failed the NPAs plan to launch an offensive in Isabela and nearby Hinaltugan town.

Both the government and the communist rebels have declared a cessation of hostility during the holiday season.

The government's ceasefire will last for three weeks—from Dec. 16 to Jan. 5 next year. The rebel Christmas truce will be for 10 days—from Dec. 22 to Jan. 2.

Navarra said Christmas is about restoration, hope, faith and trust in God despite the calamities that hit the nation and the current hardships being experienced by the people.

"I assure the people of my prayers and of always being at hand to help them," he said, stressing that he wants Christ to be present in the lives of all.

"Christmas, in my mind, is about sharing to make a difference in the lives of our fellowmen," said Negros Occidental Gov. Joseph Marañon.

This is one, he added, where values in the context of how life was in 2004.

"The new witnesses to a lot of adversities both man-made and natural. We see too have so much to be thankful about for the blessings we are rendered by God's design," he said.

Negotiations for peace between the government and communist guerrillas were stalled following the listing of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army as a terrorist organizations. Cielito Ibañez, PDI Visayas Bureau

GUYITO WILD HUNT

GRAND DRAW WINNERS

Toyota Altis 1.6 J M/T
Manuel L. Galan
Taguig

Held last December 22, 2004, PDI Executives headed by President & CEO Sandy Romualdez (center) were at hand to draw the winners for Inquirer's Guyito Wild Hunt Promo. Also present were (from left to right) VP-Marketing Donald Lim, VP-Information Technology Gerry Libby, SVP-Sales & Marketing Rene Reinoso, DTI Representative Virgilio Lansang, VP-Advertising Felipe Olarte and Associate Editor Abel Ulanday.

Motorola C650 Elizabeth S. Salapong Ifugao, Benguet	**Epson Printer** Dennis Z. Dabu Caloocan City	**Panasonic X500** Fe M. Quijano Tacloban City	**Canon A70 Digicam** Joseph Alain U. Ibuna San Mateo Rizal	**20 GB iPod** Zenaida M. Macada Palo, Leyte
Motorola C650 Maria Carlyn P. Orayo Guinobatan, Albay	**Epson Printer** Geri Nicole J. Chan Las Pinas	**iPAQ** Belinda M. Floresca Baguio City	**Canon A70 Digicam** Teodoro D. Plaza Butuan City	**Motorola E398** Faheemah Khalil Ayo Pateros	
Palm Zire 31 Eduardo S. J. Ong Pasig City	**Panasonic X300** Edgar Magpatoc Pasay City	**Palm Zire 72** Amy Evelina M. Reyes Diliman	**Olympus 400** Rhochelle Yao Greenhills, San Juan	**Panasonic X700** Lani Herman Daraga, Albay
	40 GB iPod Luzviminda B. Hate La Union	**Finepix f401** Quito del Valle Bohol	**Blackberry** Arvin A. Bernardino Quezon City	**Motorola V3** Lilia A. Fernandez Cebu City

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Former general becoming most powerful man in Subic freeport

By Tarra Quismorio
PDN Central Luzon Desk

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT — A retired general is emerging as this freeport's most powerful man as a new team takes control of managing the former American naval base and the other pillar of the Subic-Clark Growth Corridor.

Retired Maj. Gen. Jose Calimlim has joined the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority and is taking on several positions and roles.

As the SBMA senior deputy administrator for operations, retired Maj. Gen. Jose Calimlim oversees two major infrastructures: The Subic Bay International Airport and the Subic Bay freeport.

Calimlim is also president of the Freeport Services Corp., a government-owned and controlled firm tasked with security, police and investigation department.

On top of those jobs, he is also head of the SBMA's Task Force Anti-Smuggling, which President Macapagal-Arroyo created through Executive Order No. 864.

Can he get any powerful than that?

Calimlim said the reorganization instituted by SBMA Administrator Alfredo Antonio since the October takeover delineated those duties in line.

During a roundtable discussion with business council Luzon correspondents on Dec. 16, Calimlim admitted that his military background and the presence of other military men at the helm may have created the impression that Subic has turned into a garry ass state.

Under the administration of ousted President Joseph Estrada, Calimlim says she key to anti-smuggling efforts, even ending a reopened base of smuggling operations in a province controlled by a former friend of the ousted president.

Calimlim said in less than three months, he has gathered information on containers bound for Clark that are directed to Makati and Manila.

He said all products are undeclared in order for the payment of taxes not paid on who the actual smugglers were at Subic, Calimlim was right-lipped, saying that identifying them would malign even their children.

Malpractice

Hon. Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo, whose name is always dropped in smuggling operations, has no involvement when owner in smuggling at Subic, Calimlim said.

"Every time those people see his name, I call up PG Marquez. And he told me that he did not connect or he did not want his name to be used ... although he knows some of them, they were old acquaintances," Calimlim said.

President Macapagal-Arroyo, he said, also gave him clear instructions. "She said (we should arrest) people who are Mike, Mikey Pampanga Rep. Jose Miguel Arroyo) or any members of the family. That's the instruction of the President."

He said he knows how things are done at the freeport.

"It's very difficult to really pinpoint who are doing this because sometimes those people are just being used. They are outsiders, brokers. Frankly speaking, I don't know (who's behind the whole racket)," he said.

Although the anti-smuggling drive has started, Obispo Lucon, SBMA senior deputy administrator for business, said importation has not been stopped or delayed.

Companies have been importing through pre-approved import permits issued by the administration of former Subic chief executive Felicito Payumo before the court issued an injunction on the order.

Those permits are due to expire on Dec. 31, she said.

Expertise

As the SBMA is hot on the trails of smugglers, SBMA administrator Antonio said the new SBMA board possesses diverse expertise. He said this expertise will matter in pushing Subic as an investment hub and that it should be in terms of importation, manufacturing for exports, logistics, warehousing and warehousing.

By mid-2005, Antonio said the new board would have crafted a strategic plan built on the potentials of the freeport. By location, the infrastructure to and human resources.

"What is important is we're moving forward, and making gains. We came in because we felt we could make a contribution. And that is our doctrine of being brave. We will try to make a difference here because our economy needs it," Antonio said.

As for the retired general in whose hands the tasks are many and crucial, "Everyone knows my patience being already worn to raincheaper (The government would look partial if we will not help it)," Calimlim said.

GENERAL Calimlim in 2000. Has on the trail of smugglers then and now.

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PILOT CORPORATION

Opposition awaits FPJ widow's plans

By Cielito Pablo

THE DIRECTION of the opposition orchestrated by Fernando Poe Jr. will depend to a great extent on the plans of his widow, Susan Roces.

"She's the inspiration of the opposition right now," former Sen. Francisco "Kit" Tatad said yesterday in a phone interview. "We will wait for word on what she wants to do. We have to respect her desire."

Asked whether the opposition should support Roces if she embarks on a political career to fill the void left by its standard-bearer, Tatad said the matter was "still hypothetical."

To the question of whether the opposition now considered itself indefinitely with Poe's death, Tatad said: "We have not chosen a paramount leader but the opposition has many leaders."

Pressed for opposition's "prime concern" had been Poe's "peaceful and solemn burial."

"It was also the wish of Susan, and we respected that," he added.

Tatad, who tried but failed to reclaim his Senate seat during the May elections, said who is among President Macapagal-Arroyo's harshest critics, said the opposition would have to discuss "directions" within the next few days.

The possibility of Roces filling Poe's shoes was raised as early as the campaign for the presidential election.

At that time, there was talk that had Poe been disqualified from running for president on grounds that he was supposedly not a natural-born Filipino, Roces would have assumed the role of opposition standard-bearer.

Immediately after Poe's death on Dec. 14, Sen. Edgardo Angara was also quoted as saying something to the effect.

At FPJ's wake

At FPJ's bier Fernando Poe Jr. who was not able to witness the burial of his idol fights candles for him at his tomb.

Opposition senators mock oust-GMA plot

of a dual process, and they are remaining all three movies, then there was nothing to fear.

"What's the fuss? Why are they so [upset]? Only those persons who have stained have something to fear."

But according to Gonzalez, he is not a person "who cries 'Wolf!'"

"My job is as intelligence information unit, which I consider to be credible," he said at a press briefing, later pulling out from a drawer of a document marked "Confidential" and showing it to reporters.

He added: "I have my own intelligence unit here, and what we did is we cross-check with other intelligence agencies. But I done my own confirmation. I am not an expert in intelligence, but we study the intelligence. I am a reserve colonel, so I know."

Gonzalez appeared on national TV on Wednesday morning and was questioned by reporters after he made a completion for an "Oplan Coup against Arroyo." He said it was still "evolving."

He claimed that intelligence agents intercepted had conversations between an Army colonel and an opposition lawyer on the alleged plan to oust Ms. Arroyo.

He maintained that the plan was for real, saying, for instance, that the route taken by the funeral march—Espana Avenue-N.S. Amoranto Avenue-Commonwealth Avenue—was adopted at the last minute because the original plan was for the march not to pass the Malacañan Peninsula, "a route that is close to Malacañang."

'Name names'

Senators Jinggoy Estrada and Edgardo Angara called on Gonzalez and other Malacañang officials not to engage in a witch hunt and to immediately identify the leaders of the supposed plot.

"He should name names," said Estrada, the eldest son of ousted President Joseph Estrada.

Angara used a similar remark, saying it was incumbent on the administration to name the accused and provide proof.

Estrada said the allegation was "so inane and disservice to the millions of people from all walks of life who endured a physical and moral ordeal to see their last requests to Fernando Poe Jr., without any worries of encountering any act that might ruin the solemnity of the occasion or stain his legacy."

He said he saw no motive behind the disclosure of the supposed plot except to "disparage the massive show of public support and affection for the opposition's standard bearer, who is widely acknowledged as the true winner in the last presidential election."

Downgraded alert

Despite Gonzalez's warning, the Philippine National Police downgraded its alert status to heightened and effective immediately after the funeral.

PNP Director General Edgar Aglipay made the decision to allow policemen to not during the holidays, especially after the peaceful burial of Poe, Senior Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil, PNP spokesperson, said yesterday.

He said the decision was also prompted by the Communist Party of the Philippines' declaration of a 10-day ceasefire to incorporate the 20-day truce previously declared by Malacañang.

"The situation is generally peaceful nationwide as political rivalries can now take time off to spend Christmas with their family," he said.

Bataoil said he had no knowledge of the plot announced by Gonzalez.

But he said police intelligence operatives were now coordinating with Gonzalez and other agencies to verify the report and, if necessary, take action.

"We respect whatever information is gathered by other government agencies," he told reporters.

But even PNP intelligence director Robert Griño said on Wednesday that he knew nothing of the alleged plot.

"What we know is that there is a [New People's Army] Sparkle [an squad now in Metro Manila to kill top military and police officers and politicians in the 60th list," he told the reporters.

AFP, too

The Armed Forces also lowered its red alert to white alert, the lowest alert level in the military code, during the peaceful funeral march for Poe.

But it is monitoring the movements of two colonels involved in the supposed destabilization plot.

Retired, however, declined to name the colonels and to specify their involvement in the alleged plot.

He also justified the swift downgrading of the AFP's alert status by saying that "the threat has already been neutralized" and "the normalcy of the situation in the National Capital Region was restored."

'Very volatile'

Lapiz said that even at the height of the funeral march, there had never been a change of plans or calls of warning Malacañang.

"There was no plan to do anything like that, nor did I [hear] anyone speak of doing that," said Lapiz, who had marched near the carriage carrying Poe's casket.

He said the huge turnout on Wednesday was a "tribulation" for Poe's bereaved family and for himself.

But Gonzalez described the conditions as the funeral as "very volatile, very emotional."

"So many rabble-rousers there. So many inflammatory statements have been made. So many fanatical people. they would thing that will happen there will create a lot of fire," he said, adding:

"It doesn't need explanation that at the height of the EV thing, there would be violence obtained. So you [know] what was at the back of their mind."

But before noon on Wednesday hours after the funeral, PNP chief Aglipay said the hundreds of policemen put on standby on the streets near the funeral route would go home.

He also praised the Poe family's members and supporters, saying they had done a great job of keeping their ranks in order.

No charges

With the wake having "since passed," the Department of Justice is not considering filing charges against those involved in the plot, Gonzalez said.

He acknowledged that the military and police had "already downgraded the situation."

"It's clear that the situation has calmed down," he said. "If you start doing those things [filing charges], even if it's legally correct, you'll just reopened left and right the so-called human rights advocates."

But he insisted that the threat remained. "The problem about people who are continuing to feel adventurist is still there, because someone in my statement that they are targeting Feb. 25 or May 1."

Gonzalez scoffed at warnings that he could be charged with arms-napping for listening in on the conversations of the alleged plotters.

"If you are a party line to a telephone, you may listen," he said. "If incidentally you are able to listen to a discussion with somebody and you write, that is not arms-napping. That is the Supreme Court decision. Wiretapping is if you intentionally tap a telephone to listen."

On Tatad's remark that the plot was a mere product of his imagination, Gonzalez said: "If Mr. Tatad does not know what I know, he can probably say that. But we are sure people are always pessimistic about statements coming from the administration. But I am not a person who cries 'Wolf!' that allows the wolf to come."

Thing of the past

Poe supporters vowed to continue their quest for the truth in the May presidential election, but denied allegations that they were ready to launch another Edsa-like uprising.

"Edsa is a thing of the past. Hindi nang mauulit na Edsa," Bro Conse, head of the National Coordinating Council of Volunteers for FPJ, said hours before Poe's funeral.

Conse said his group would focus on its energies on Poe's protest case lodged before the Presidential Electoral Tribunal because "that is where it's [the legal claim" to the presidency].

"We cannot accept what they are saying, that the case has become moot and academic because FPJ is dead," said Ruth Guinsatao, leader of the 1812 Movement for Freedom.

But Guinsatao and his group was still unclear about its future plans. "It's too early to say. We have just got our leader," he said sadly.

"What is important is for the truth [about the election] to come out," he added. With reports from Christine T. Esguerra, Alexis Romero and Ey Zamora

Local body to decide payment for Naia-3 builders

the government of breaking the law in expropriating the terminal, and dismissed the damn payment as unjustified.

Paguirit reported its demands for financial compensation in a long-running legal battle that is currently before the World Bank's International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

In a separate statement, Press lawyer Lisuyang Vicente Claire asserted that the government could vindicate the terminal "in a choice to Malacañang."

"It was also the wish of Susan, and we respected that," he added.

Tatad, who tried but failed to reclaim his Senate seat during the May elections, said who is among President Macapagal-Arroyo's harshest critics, said the opposition would have to discuss "directions" within the next few days.

The possibility of Roces filling Poe's shoes was raised as early as the campaign for the presidential election.

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manipulate the compensation that would be eventually adjudicated."

He said the government had acted in "bad faith" by taking over the terminal, even while negotiations with the consortium were still being pursued.

The government, backed by the Supreme Court, earlier annulled the operating contract with Piatco, saying the 1998 document signed by the previous government of Joseph Estrada had been disadvantageous to the government.

The terminal has been left unused since major building work was virtually completed in 2002.

Two senators from opposite sides of the political lines called for the opening of the terminal, but then said Piatco and Paguirit must be paid just compensation.

Administration Sen. Richard Gordon said he favored the immediate opening of Naia-3 because the country "badly needs a modern airport to boost tourism and economic activities."

Gordon, chair of the Senate committee on government corporations and sovereignty, recognized that state had the power to expropriate assets in the interest of the public.

However, he cautions that the expropriation of the terminal by the government might send a wrong signal to international investors, who might balk at doing business in the country again—all said to suffer the same fate of Naia-3's builders.

To ensure international investors, Gordon asked Malacañang to pay full and just compensation to the consortium that built the terminal within the six months that it intends to finish work on Naia-3 to make it operational.

He also stressed that government should operate the facility only until after it had fully paid the consortium.

Opposition Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile also stressed the need to immediately open the airport.

But the government must study the takeover's impact on foreign investments, relations with countries involved in the project and commitment under international treaties, which Poe-Juan is now invoking to protect its interests, Enrile said.

He said the country could face sequestration of its assets abroad should the final ruling by the ICSID favor the consortium. He said expropriation was subject to the payment of just compensation.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said President Macapagal-Arroyo "welcomed" the "overwhelming positive response" to the takeover of Naia-3 from different sectors.

Bunye said the President had ordered the Office of the Solicitor General to continue its efforts to reach an amicable settlement to maintain Piatco and Paguirit for their assessments. Reports from AFP Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. and Wilabeth Lim Diaz

Guinness lists RP . . .

TIMES of thousands of health buffs joined the Department of Health's Healthy Living Exercise at the Quirino Grandstand in Fairview. The aerobics class has been recorded to be the best in the world by the Guinness Book of World Records.

"Largest Aerobics Demonstration/Class."

The country holds other Guinness World Records, such as Most Couples Kissing Simultaneously, Longest Strike, Longest Worm, Smallest Prehistoric Fish, Shortest Adult Actor in a Leading Role, Most Widespread Computer Virus, Largest Piped Crowd and Largest Mouse.

"We did it, but it would not have been possible if not for the all-out support from different sectors, such as the academe, business, pharmaceuticals group, the nongovernment organizations and other government agencies," Duque said in a statement.

The Department of Health launched the national healthy lifestyle campaign spearheaded by the Department of Health to prevent the emerging lifestyle diseases, which are among the top causes of death in the Philippines.

Simultaneous aerobics demonstrations were also held in Davao, gathering 16,500 participants, and in Cebu, with 23,000 people.

The 46,388 participants recorded in Manila was actually lower than the estimated 100,000 that flocked to the Quirino to participate in the event.

The government's healthy lifestyle campaign, dubbed "Sing-Hi, Sayo!" integrates the DOH's antismoking projects, regular physical activity and weight control, healthy diet and nutrition, stress management and regular checkup.

Duque said the campaign emphasized the need for Filipinos to practice a healthy lifestyle and for policymakers to provide an environment supportive of healthy lifestyle practices.

Exercising moderately 30 minutes day can reduce the risk of developing degenerative diseases like stroke, liver and kidney diseases, hypertension and cancer, according to health experts.

Heart disease killed 53,020 Filipinos in 1998, making it the leading cause of mortality in the country. Cancer ranked fourth; diabetes, eighth; and kidney failure, 10th.

The DOH said that many of the leading causes of death among Filipinos have lifestyle diseases that could have been avoided with the observance of a healthy lifestyle.

BUSINESS

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E-mail at ... Website: ...

Editor Raul G. Hercula
Assistant Editor Corrie S. Mariano

DOTC hits Piatco stance on Naia-3

By Cinderella S. Bautista

THE DEPARTMENT of Transportation and Communications yesterday said it would help the Arroyo administration determine the appropriate amount to compensate the private consortium that built the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3.

Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza warned that the government has not laid the end of its patience in dealing with groups that have been trying to delay the operation of the Naia-3.

"The DOTC has reached the limit of its tolerance," the transport chief said.

Philippine International Air Terminal Corp. (Piatco) assailed the government on Wednesday for allegedly "railroading" the court proceedings.

"The court will hence commissioners to determine just compensation for Piatco. The government takeover of Terminal 3 is legal following a court order granting DOTC the right to possess said property in order to uphold public interest," Mendoza said.

The transport chief said the transfer of the airport operations within six months.

"The DOTC has to make a balance between upholding the interest of investors and protecting national interests," he added.

Alfonso Cusi, general manager of the Manila International Airport Authority, said airport authorities have started to work with engineering groups to ensure that the bid of each new opening Naia-3 for commercial operations.

The government had claimed that the Naia-3 had more than 40 defects in construction.

Cusi said the government would take back an independent audit for it to conduct an inventory of the airport's facilities and equipment. The MIAA operates the Naia domestic and international airports.

The new terminal was built to replace Naia-1, which is more than 20 years old. Naia-3 is designed to handle 20 million to 30 million passengers a year.

The government said that once the new terminal is operational, Naia-1 would be closed for repairs.

Trade Secretary Cesar Purisima said the other day that under the rules of court, the government could immediately take over the Naia-3 after filing the expropriation case, notifying the defendant, and paying an initial downpayment.

He promised that the government would offer just compensation to the private sector group that built the new airport terminal, as ordered by the Supreme Court last year, when it nullified the government's build-operate-transfer contract signed with Piatco in 1997.

Piatco is 60-percent owned by the Cheng family, 30 percent by Fraport, and 10 percent by Hutchison Corp. of Japan. The company said it would have to pay $356 million to Takenaka International Corp., a Japan-based construction firm hired to build the facility.

The Arroyo administration had offered to pay Piatco $356 million so it could operate the Naia-3, but the concessionaire that finished the terminal in 2002 said the amount was not enough to cover its costs.

Piatco had filed an arbitration case before the Stockholm International Chamber of Commerce in

11-month investments jump 237%

By Bonnie W. Domingo

INVESTMENTS approved in the first 11 months amounted P467.4 billion, 237 percent higher than the P49.7 billion registered in the same period last year.

Documents from the Department of Trade and Industry showed that the latest figures represented a significant recovery from the slide to P39.7 billion in 2000 against P97.5 billion in 2002.

The BTI did not separate numbers from the Board of Investments and The Philippine Economic Zone Authority.

There were 390 projects registered from January to November, an increase of 22.4 percent from 954 a year ago.

The investments are expected to provide 70,709 jobs to directly hired workers, up 20.3

(Continued on A2)

CURRENCIES

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

DECEMBER

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

P56.31 = $1

as of 5 p.m., Dec. 10, 2004

$1 = ¥106.21

as of 5 p.m., Dec. 10, 2004

GOLD: $443.80/OUNCE

per Asian Trading, Dec. 10, 2004

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX

(Stock market report on Page B3)

Shares close slightly higher

3A&BC points rebound 0.38 percent higher yesterday, lifted by continued bargain hunting and renewed window-dressing.

Bullish call

They said the market will likely end further gains in the remaining two trading days of this year, but the expected rise may not be enough to break the resistance to record five-year high of 1,909.

Renewed buying activities closed from Dec. 29 to 31 for the Christmas break, and saffron open on the 30th and the 29th, before closing again until after the New Year.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index rose 7.27 points or 0.38 percent to 1,909.49 after trading between 1,900.19 and 1,914.04.

Volume totaled 1.28 billion shares worth P820.66 million from 1.08 billion shares worth P888.8 million on Wednesday. AFP

GIR seen to remain at $15B in '05

AGGI aims to close McDonald's deal in 1st quarter

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE RANCHO brand of ng Filipino cuisine is on great international expansion to compete in $1.4-$2b billion in 2005, the same level targeted for this year, as the economy rebounds on the global business environment.

In a press briefing, BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura said it would be nice if the country were to post higher growth rates in exports as this would help build up the GIR. But, as the global economy appeared headed for a downturn next year, the BSP said the country could not rely on export earnings alone to generate foreign exchange.

A regional report recently released by the Asian Development Bank said the resulting drama of the global electronics cycle, weather, growth in industrial countries and an economic slowdown in China would likely lead to a lower gross domestic product growth of 4.7 percent next year.

The domestic economy likely grew by 6.1 percent this year, based on the government's latest estimates.

The country's GIR slipped to a nine-month low of $15.92 billion in mid-November due to outflows for public sector debt servicing. The rate is 6.6 percent lower than the updated level of $16.92 billion as of end-October and the $16.82 billion level posted in November last year.

The GIR—consisting of the BSP's gross foreign currency holdings, gold reserves, special drawing rights from multilateral institutions and foreign investments—is seen as an indicator of the country's ability to service its foreign exchange requirements.

The fair GIR build-up expected by the BSP for 2005 is also related to the foreign borrowing task planned by the national government.

They agreed that they would go beyond $8.03 percent, which is double," BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura said.

Apart from from the government's foreign borrowings help boost the GIR which, in turn, cover payments for the importation of goods and debt servicing. The BSP likes to see the GIR when it tends to defend the local currency from speculative attacks.

The current GIR level is still adequate to cover about 4.1 months of imports of goods as well as payments of services and income. Alternatively, this level entails 2.6 times the country's short-term debt based on original maturity and 1.40 times based on residual maturity.

Short-term debt based on residual maturity includes outstanding short-term external debt based on original maturity plus principal payments on medium- and long-term loans of the public and private sectors falling due within the next 12 months.

The drawn build-up of the foreign reserves this year is partly due to the slowdown in the current account surplus, a major component of the balance of payment.

The current account records trade in goods and services as well as transfers while the capital and financial account records loan transactions, investment flows, short-term capital and other related items.

According to the BSP, the lower current account surplus this year was due to the rise in imports and did not mean that the country was losing its competitive edge in global trade. The higher import bill was also attributed to the hiring of workers.

Low farmgate prices, high consumer prices

By Ernesto Ordoñez

COMMENTARY

Disclosures

11-month

Season's Greetings!

Asiatrust Bank announces its Banking Schedule for the Holidays:

24 December 2004, Friday — 8:30AM to 12:00NN
26 December, Sunday — Regular banking hours for selected branches with Sunday banking (Ayala Center Mall, Ayala Plaza Mall, Eton Commonwealth)
28 & 29 December (Tues. & Wed.) — Regular banking days (8:30AM to 4:30PM)
30 & 31 December (Thurs. & Fri.) — 8:30AM to 12:00NN
2 January 2005, Sunday — Regular banking hours for selected branches with Sunday banking (Ayala Center Mall, Ayala Plaza Mall, Eton Commonwealth)

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Another Razon to rejoice

THE PHILIPPINE ICTSI of Enrique Razon Jr. and the Sorianos has just announced that the Okinawa container cargo terminal contract by the Japanese government.

The Okinawa port of Naha should add around 1 container more business to the ICTSI Group when the Okinawa container terminal opens in 2006, according to the projection.

ICTSI now operates the container cargo terminals in the Philippines, Australia, Europe, Brazil, Asia, Pakistan, Africa, in addition to the International port in Manila Harbor, Subic and Batangas, Batangas.

The Okinawa port victory came right after ICTSI had been shut out of all but eventually lost in the international bidding for the operation of 18 acres of US rail-mount CXE vehicle & rented land of container cargo terminal operations spread around the globe.

News of the Okinawa victory was made public after the local stock market had closed. ICTSI closed yesterday at P5.79, unchanged from the previous day. The stock has more than doubled from its 52-week low of P2.72.

ICTSI has also submitted a bid to operate the container cargo terminal of the port of Corpus Christi, Texas.

Architectural redesperadoes

ARCHITECT Jose Maloon should not mope about Barangay Urdaneta Executive Subdivision and plans for the Friendship Hall of the Urdaneta Village since there are no Maloon plans or drawings to discard to Angas mob, now getting rid of the angry captain Angelo Reyes.

Maloon not only spearheaded the ongoing architectural credit Woodside, Dec. 22, 2004, the architect even found the late Sen. of Camiguin, Emiliano Hilario Abaya, the Urdaneta Village Homeowners Association who manages functionaries had turned down credited for the renovation plan.

According to Reyes, the village association commissioned Maloon, but the barangay, which was headed by the councilors, decided to scale down and instead rely on plans drawn up by the city engineering department.

"My boss never had any arrangement with architect Maloon," Reyes quipped, adding that the renovation simply involved the installation of glass doors, windows and air-conditioning units to the village hall.

Neighborly jump

THE PRESIDENT of Philippine Townships, Real Marketers, is leaving the Consortium company to join and help revive Philippine Realty of the Lucanos after being offered a paramedic title.

Hallcrest developed Uno Mckinley and the still rising Narwacs Tower in the East, while Philrealty plans to build two condos in what is now the parking lot between the Pacific Plaza Towers and DCC Golf.

Incidentally, the planned Philrealty condos are right across from the condominiums from Uno Mckinley.

Heard through the grapevine

BITOGS landlord Leonardo Ulanda has stepped on a lot of big toes, the latest being those of Boots Jar Go. Lee "David" Shapiro's.

Cocktales will take a holiday break and will be back on Jan. 3, 2005.

(Email: rodolfo.e.pilapil@mail.ec or rodolfo_pil@yahoo.com)

COCKTALES

Hector C. Agoncillo

New revenue-sharing deal boosts Piltel revenue by ₱7B

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE REVISED scheme for revenue sharing and management charges between the wireless units of Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. will add P7 billion to the coffers of Philippine Telephone Corp. this year.

Piltel chair Manuel Pangilinan said that with the new agreement on revenue sharing, Piltel will end up with a net income of P7.76 billion in the first three quarters, from P744 million.

The board of directors of Piltel and Smart last Wednesday approved the plan to shift 10 percent of wireless revenue to Piltel, from the previous 50-50 sharing, as payment for Piltel's use of Smart's cellular infrastructure and facilities.

The new agreement would also score the management fee being charged to Piltel for network, maintenance, customer care and general administration.

"This change will result in the reallocation of a positive P5.3 billion adjustment to Piltel's operating results for the period, Smart's to duplicate," said Piltel in a statement.

"In addition, Smart shall compensate Piltel P13.7 billion representing Piltel's equitable share of revenues as a result of it having achieved a critical mass of subscribers and resultant economies of scale rather than anticipated," the company statement added.

Changes in revenue arrangement between Piltel and Smart Communications Inc. would likewise allow Piltel to make full use of P4.3 billion in tax losses following years of losses.

About 20.3 million in Piltel's net losses could lapse by 2008.

Piltel had been in the red since 1997 and the net loss last year reached P1.16 billion.

Mobile sales were make up 67 percent of Piltel's revenue after its subscriber base reached 4.2 million in end-September.

Together with Smart, PLDT's wireless subscribers stood at 17.3 million by the end of the fourth quarter.

"The earnings would be reflected in PLDT since the group had consolidated the books of its wireless business. There are some books because about 6 percent of Piltel is owned by the public," said Pangilinan.

Piltel shares closed at P1.310 yesterday, up from P1.46 Wednesday.

The year, Piltel's share price had surged by more than 100 percent.

But Smart bought a 97-percent stake in Piltel, from PLDT for only 23.59 centavos per share.

Cargill sees better year for feeds in '05

By Christine A. Gopuco

ANIMAL feeds manufacturer Cargill Philippines, which listed the Pantao here, expects a 5-percent increase in its sales next year as meats increase their feed population.

Cargill product manager Jonny G. Concato told the business reporting that the increase in the selling price of hogs in the second half of this year has encouraged livestock raisers to boost production.

Livestock and marinated production would boost demand for animal feeds next year by about 20,000 metric tons.

"We see the year to be positive as hog prices slightly soared to P95 or P100 per kilogram at the farmgate, urged raisers to improve on production," Concato said.

Cargill Philippines is the local unit of Cargill Inc., an international marketing processor and distributor of agricultural, food, financial and industrial products and services. It operates in 60 countries.

In the Philippines, Cargill produces feeds for the livestock, poultry and aquaculture sectors, such as the Pantao and Pasli Premium feeds.

Cargill Philippines said it was close to getting a HACCP (Hazard Analysis in Critical Control Points) certification from the Bureau de Surveillance OIDS, which will make it the first feedmilling company in the Philippines to have all of its plants HACCP certified.

Based Angeles, Cargill Philippines animal laboratory head, said a HACCP certification will further bolster the company's position as one of the country's world-class feedmilling operations.

"Our efforts to be HACCP certified is part of the company's global initiative to promote food safety, starting with our animal feed products," said Angeles.

HACCP is a management system designed for use in all segments of the food industry, including animal production.

Each HACCP food safety is addressed through the analysis and control of biological, chemical and physical hazards, from processing of raw materials and ingredients, to product packaging and distribution.

Angeles said that with the system's implementation in all of its plants and facilities in the Philippines, HACCP will minimize or totally eliminate the feeds' possible contamination from biological hazards like bacteria, pathogens and mycotoxins, chemical hazards like pesticides, veterinary drugs and physical hazards like stones, glass, pieces of wood and other foreign materials.

In working to get a HACCP certificate from BOI, Angeles said Cargill Philippines is being assessed by the company's external laboratory experts in its Pulilan, Bulacan, plant.

"We are being helped by our experts from the several laboratory. They support our laboratory and HACCP engineers in managing the quality assurance program," he added.

The laboratory tests raw materials for parasite, fiber, fats, ash, mineral and vitamin contents.

They also measure the raw materials' content processing and assesses the quality control of the finished feed product," said Angeles.

The Pulilan plant has an ISO 17025 certification and is so far the only ISO-rated feed mill plant laboratory in the country.

Among Cargill's more than 40 laboratories worldwide, the Philippine laboratory scored the highest in terms of safety and second highest in terms of quality.

Teves asks fisherfolk to get loans

DAGUPAN CITY—The Land Bank of the Philippines has asked coastal fishermen, one of the private recipients of the government's aid bank, to avail themselves of loans for their fishing business needs.

Margarita Teves, LBP president, said the fishery sector has not been fully reached by the banking and many of the fishermen cooperatives have applied for loans.

"There is a time when only the big capitalists need the money for fish culture.

But with the fishery ordinance, even small fishermen can build their own fishery ventures in the future, he said.

Last, however, said the lack of capital made it difficult for small fishermen to put up their own fishery development.

"They need to be more cooperative (members of the fish pens owned by the big capitalists who provide the nets, boats, etc.) and not work on their own," he said. "The missing component is financing."

Teves assured that the LBP would extend loans in the city's small fishermen. Teves said in the last two years, many borrowers have availed themselves of loans from the LBP for the purchase of boats and other equipment.

"This is, perhaps, because we intensify the processing time and we have become liberal with the collateral requirements. There is, once the cooperatives and micro-businesses who run into failure to conducting fisherfolk's studies on existing borrowers," he said.

The LBP has a standing P47-million loan to Pangasinan—P333 million intended to cooperatives and P105 million representing livelihood projects and entrepreneurs.

Teves said most of the deposits generated in the Bicol are plowed back to the region to loans.

He said that last year, the deposit-to-loan ratio was P5.2 to P1 (meaning, for every P5.2 deposit, P1 is borrowed by residents in the area).

"Now, the ratio is P4.2 to P1," Teves said.

Eduardo Estalo-Pascua, PIR Dateline's former chief reporter, died Wednesday after he suffered a heart attack while playing basketball at the Philippine Navy Officers Village Gymnasium in Rosario, Cavite. He was 52.

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BUSINESS

BSP lowers '05 BOP surplus target to $464M

But officials say foreign direct investment will still be much higher next year

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas has scaled down its balance of payments surplus target for 2005 to $464 million from the original projection of $573 million—despite due to some deferred investments in the manufacturing sector.

In a press briefing yesterday, BSP Deputy Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. said the target was lowered due to changes in the assumptions which the Board of Investments used in the projects of fresh investments expected to come in next year.

But Tetangco added that the expected foreign direct investment in 2005 would still be significantly higher than the inflows this year.

Although the BOP target for 2005 has been lowered, it still represents a turnaround from the $516 million deficit reported for this year.

The BOP measures the foreign exchange transactions between the economy and the rest of the world. Its major components are the current account and the capital and financial account.

During yesterday's briefing, the BSP also announced that the country's current account climbed up a surplus of $2.91 billion in the first nine months of the year—$7.1 percent better than a year ago, on stronger remittances from overseas Filipino workers and improved trade performance.

The current account records trade in goods and services as well as transfers. Any transaction which gives rise to a payment by a Philippine resident, like import duties, is a debit item, while any transaction which gives rise to a receipt like exporting or inward remittance is a surplus item.

THE BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas building on Roxas Boulevard

BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura said that for the third quarter alone, the current account is the third quarter registered at a surplus of $1.4 billion, higher than the $1.07 billion a year ago.

"The robust remittances from OFWs, coupled with the lower deficit in the trade in goods account were behind the improvement in the current account for the third quarter despite the weaker performance of the services account," Buenaventura said.

OFW remittances in the third quarter went up by 22.3 percent to $2.38 billion.

"The third quarter surge made up for the second quarter decline when anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing restrictions translated a number of new documentation requirements prior to remittance," he said.

The deterioration in the capital and financial account dragged down the country's overall balance of payments which continued to be in a deficit.

However, the BOP deficit of $176 million in the first nine months of the year was still an improvement over the $773 million deficit in the same period last year.

The trade in goods balance posted a lower deficit of $23 million in the third quarter as the 21.2 percent growth in exports during the period slightly surpassed the import growth of 20.9 percent.

Customs Brokers Act up for review

BY Manuel M. Dacoycoy

THE IMPLEMENTATION of the Customs Brokers Act has been deferred pending the review of its implementing rules amid opposition of customs importers and operators, Trade Secretary Cesar A. Purisima yesterday said.

The Bureau of Customs announced the deferment through a Dec. 15 memorandum.

Purisima, who also chairs the Export Development Council, is leading industry players and several business chambers in pushing for the amendment of the law.

"[They] are objecting to a provision of the law that requires the hiring of professional customs brokers in transacting export papers with the BOC," the official said.

The provision automatically strips exporters and small businesses of the right to transact and process their own papers with the BOC as well as their right to sign their own export documents, Purisima explained.

He said customs brokers were agents by nature and exporters were principals who should not be barred in processing their own papers.

"The new procedure entails additional cost and could mean longer transactional time," Purisima said. "The law also contradicts the objectives and provisions of the Electronic Commerce Act in customs clearance and customs bank-to-bank processing."

Purisima said the law might have good objectives for customs brokers but it failed to consider the interests of other sectors like exporters, importers, forwarders and corporate customs brokers.

"It also failed to consider the other professionals engaged in the industry like lawyers, accountants and engineers," he said.

Among those opposed to implementing the Customs Brokers Act are the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Philippine Exporters Confederation, Semiconductor and Electronics Industries in the Philippines, Foot Wear Confederation, Freight Forwarders Association, Pantaga Chambers of the Philippines (PCP) and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Philippines (JCCI).

In a position paper, the FCI said some of the law's provisions would be a major setback rather than a benefit to the economy.

The JCCI said the law would increase the cost of trade and cause the loss of "a great number of jobs" which run counter to government goals.

Solons oppose lifting of fiscal incentives for investors

THE PROPOSAL to rationalize fiscal incentives granted to several industries and organizations have sought willing in Congress, as legislators and affected groups have appealed not to lift the tax and duty perks of selected sectors.

According to a government source, the House of Representatives has created a group that will gather all the amendments legislators want inserted into the bills on fiscal incentives rationalization. The proposed amendments will be discussed when the Lower House resumes session in January.

The source said Makati Rep. Benjamin Aquino objected to the provision in the

bill that seeks to lift the incentives granted to investors in the country's geothermal energy sector, such as income tax holiday and duty-free importation for capital equipment.

Aquino Rep. Emmylou Taliño for his part, does not want to remove the fiscal incentives granted to coal production, amid the government's stand to revitalize the mining industry, the source also said.

According to a report by the House committee on ways and means, other groups that voiced objections to some of the provisions of the proposed bill were the Department of Science and Technology, the National Power Authority, the Cooperative Development Authority, Department of Energy, PAGC-EDC, and Subic-Clark-Tarlac Authority. They said the lifting of fiscal incentives granted to their sectors will adversely affect investments and jobs.

There are two bills related to the rationalization of fiscal incentives. One covers the incentives granted to firms registered with the Board of Investments, while the other covers the perks granted by several special laws.

The first bill is drafted by the BOI, while the second is drafted by the Department of Finance (DOF).

Under the BOI's draft bill, the government will come up with a new investment priorities plan, under which a new set of industries that will enjoy incentives are covered.

The list of the IPP will be changed every three years, compared with the previous system where the IPP is changed every year.

The Arroyo administration has included the rationalization of fiscal incentives in her fiscal reform agenda.

According to the government, it lost some P340 billion in taxes and duties in 2003 alone due to fiscal incentives.

Michelle U. Remo

RP gets deteriorating mark from US bank

By Michelle V. Remo

US-BASED investment bank Bear, Stearns Co. Inc. has given the Philippines a "deteriorating" credit outlook for 2005.

According to bank officials, the Philippine government has yet to show significant progress in implementing the measures intended to solve the country's fiscal problems.

While the Philippines received a "deteriorating" credit outlook, China, Pakistan, and Indonesia all earned an "improving" mark from Bear, Stearns. India received a "stable" outlook while Malaysia earned a "positive" mark.

Although Congress has already passed the six taxes law, the Philippines may still face the risk of a credit rating downgrade by a month or two. According to Bear, Stearns, other fiscal reform measures must get the nod of Congress so that their economic impact may be felt early next year.

"Some [rate] Moody's and Fitch are reviewing their ratings for the Philippines as we speak, and could follow through with a one- to two-notch downgrade if they are not impressed with the current efforts of Congress to approve the legislation requested by President Macapagal-Arroyo," Bear, Stearns said in a paper on its 2005 outlook for Asian economies. Bear, Stearns was referring to the credit rating firms Moody's Investors Service and Fitch ratings.

The investment bank said the Philippine government, although on track to meet its budget deficit target of P199.8 billion this year, should enact more efforts to narrow down the fiscal gap, which is still estimated to hover above 4 percent of the gross domestic product this year.

The Arroyo administration is pushing for several fiscal reform measures. So far, Congress has passed only one—the six taxes law. The Arroyo administration is hoping legislators will prioritize the revenue-raising measures early next year to offset the threat of a credit rating downgrade.

The other measures include the bureau of internal revenue (BIR) system for revenue-collection agencies, the increase of the value-added tax and the rationalization of fiscal incentives. Once all the measures are in place, the government can expect to generate over P130 billion in revenue every year.

Bear, Stearns also urged the Philippine government to restructure its efforts in privatization of the National Power Corp., and to adopt a future stand against the growing budget deficit.

On a positive note, Bear, Stearns cited the "surprising" gross domestic product growth in the first three quarters of the year, which averaged at 6.3 percent, or higher than the 4.4 percent recorded the previous year.

"Although reports have improved somewhat in the early months of 2005, the key drivers of the economy remain agriculture and foreign remittances, it said. "These factors are responsible for the unusually stable performance of consumption in the formation of the Philippines' GNP."

LIFESTYLE

INQUIRER EXCLUSIVE

The designer who loves women

Lanvin creative director Alber Elbaz talks about the difference between global and universal, and why Lanvin has no celebrity endorsers

By Ging Go
Contributor

TAIPEI— It wasn't a surprise for fashion insiders that Alber Elbaz, creative director of Lanvin, visited Taiwan. The bigger wonder is that took him so long. Aside from being a powerful fashion market in Asia, Taiwan is also the home of the 115-year-old couture house's new owner, Wang Kwok Lun, who bought the label in September 2001.

Madame Wang is among the growing number of Chinese businesspersons buying and owning traditional European labels. The others are Christian Dior (Bernard), Silver Chow (Asprey), Anthony Lin (Rochas Atelier), Hobson Poon (Harvey Nichols) and JJ Duggan (no name yet).

(That's not all, of course. Involved in the Taiwanese press, but there was little presence on the part of French's oldest couture house because the company chose to observe its haute-era traditions down low about 100 people.

The show was not a retrospective of a certain Spring/Summer 05 show but a summary of what Elbaz feels are the best looks that epitomize the Lanvin spirit.

After the show, in one of Taipei's premiere private dining clubs, Elbaz spoke to the Inquirer about globalization versus universality, fashion victims, his pure love of the fashion press and why Lanvin has not jumped on the celebrity bandwagon.

I have to ask this question, which is such a cliché, but in this year's Marie Claire designer of the year and Vogue 100's top three couture designers, I have to ask: What is the formula?

You mean a person? Well, Amanda, Carmen, Amy, Kate...

(This is when I realized he was reeling off names out of celebrities list of the girls who worked at Lanvin Taiwan and Inc.)

I guess that means anyone has the potential to be chic.

Given how you are wearing my jacket, by the way, and I am so flattered when I see the fashionistas wearing my clothes, I notice that most of them also wear no clothes to select people's dress during fashion week. For me, this is the greatest compliment.

Perhaps you can indulge me on such a chi chi question: What are you full for the coming Spring/Summer 05 season?

You know, I don't like to talk about those things.

I know, but I'm curious if we have the same ideas because a lot of the key pieces you had in the show are what I have chosen for myself.

It's full. I have to say it has to be the romantic side with embroidery, and the spring/summer is the relaxed side. You'll see it on me.

I want to say something of it is a hobby that will

PIPECABLE details, fit and flawless tailoring make every Lanvin piece a work of art.

HALTER-LAYERED rose silk chiffon-over-a-camisole was a Spring/Summer 2005 hit. Elbaz wanted to show gowns and protection, and coherence, to match the cover-up the Renaissance ladies were supposed to have avoided decade in captivity in 1900.

ONE of the dresses Kate Moss made famous and then became a complete villain the world over.

The designer who loves women

From page C2

(Above) NOT quite a retrospective but rather a spring/summer 2005 show entitled "Dragonfly," said Elliot.

brand. I wonder, can we go any further from what we have been since then?

I believe that it's not about labels, it's not about names and it's not about globalization either. The word is universal—it is very different from global but also very similar. Global is having the same storefronts on London, Paris and Taiwan, but universal is someone in two different countries who both like chocolate and the same dress. (The following week, Paul Smith also made an observation in his speech at the International Herald Tribune Luxury Conference in Hong Kong, saying that he just came back from New York, Paris and Milan and he could hardly tell one store from the other in terms of look.)

Everything is shifting. I believe everything that is happening today is much more personal, luxurious and individualistic. I find that people are looking for something more individual and they don't want to look like a clone of someone else. Everyone wants to look unique. I believe Lanvin has that personality, an individuality and beauty.

For the longest time everyone thought that whenever you sell you make an exit and if you gain something beautiful it was old. So what I want to do is to show that beautiful is modern. (At the same luncheon, Elliot, in his speech mentioned the word "luxury" 19 times. "People look for things and I ask, 'Why?,' he said. "We should go forward. Tradition can come you, but not stop your evolution you.")

What about people who wear brands to use Lanvin?

I hope people do not wear brand to use Lanvin. I am not a merchant. I am a designer, and I will not be happy to see a fashion victim. That is not my thing. I like it when people have a sense of freedom and they are not dictated us. I am not a dictator and this type of international fashion is not relevant anymore. Women today know what they want, know what they need, and they have a lifestyle that I find so complex, and I'm not here to tell them what to wear. You're going to wear what you want and if Lanvin is the right thing to wear at that time, it's wonderful. If you want to, you can mix it with a T-shirt from Gap or a navy-orange piece.

In this fashion business environment of super-ego brands, how are you going to grow your brand or do you even want to grow your brand to become a Gucci or LVMH?

I want to be able to keep control of what I'm doing and keep uniqueness in the collection. I don't want to be something that I'm not. I am working in a company that is boutique, which is a not too big nor too small. Lanvin employs about 300 people worldwide. It is still personal and I can still see and do everything.

I have about commercialism...none of the best business people I have ever met in my 25 years of working were motivated by or focused about the bottom line. (Wouldn't you rather spend your next night in conversation dreaming?" At the IHT Luxury Conference he also credited his former employer and investor, the late Geoffrey Beene, who taught him not to use the word "commercial" but instead say "fashion.")

Does this mean there is no current must-have bag and seasonal must-have?

I want clothes with some sort of meaning—that a woman will look good in and not only in a show. I don't believe, personally, in a fashion show where the main purpose is promoting perfume and cigarettes and maybe a bag. This is not my story. My story is that I make women look good and feel good. Once if they want the bag or the perfume, that's perfect, but that's not what I'm doing. (Lanvin shows hardly parade bags or have flatout display of accessories.) I don't do a bag in every video look and I don't go after the real estate.

You mentioned even eight days?

Many companies are doing it. Everyone is selling me that (celebrity endorsement) and so inspired. I made sure that we did not run after everyone. Because when they come to you, you have a better dialogue and when they come to us and say it's our or nothing, we say Lanvin, then I work with the actress, but I don't believe in running after people and paying them money to wear my clothes. I think those days are over and if someone wears it, whether she is famous or not famous, I will help her.

So that the way you also handle your personal game? Cautiously? Because until last year, there wasn't very much so you or Lanvin.

When I started at Lanvin, the brand in October 2002, I always had this weird relationship with the press. You can be so critical and critical about things but it's one thing to tell and another to do. And to do sometimes takes so much energy to put it together and to run it, worry about whether they would love it or not. I remember just before my first show of Lanvin, a journalist friend in Paris said to me, 'Alber, I don't understand why you're scared or knowledge about it because then are women and women, you know, for what is the problem?

All of a sudden it clicked. From that on, I decided I was not going to be scared of the press. I am going to do clothes to please women—the mothers, the daughters, the wives, and son. I will not make clothes that not only you can write about or photograph but that you will wear. And when I see a press person wearing my clothes, I feel this is the best compliment I can ever get.

I think it is very good that I don't think like a consultant but like a designer. First of all that is what I was trying to explain. People ask me what is your title—commercial director, artistic director, but titles don't mean anything. What I do is make clothes. I am trying to work with women and understand them and build up

FLIRTY: Elliot, 8 finely pleated number was quite vintage, which illustrates Elliot's desire to move on from vintage

SOMEONE who assumed to be a dancer after wearing his dream gift of Saint Laurent Elliot takes a bow in Taipei celebrating what he is good at, "making clothes."

LIVING up to a tradition since 1889. For someone who left France for New York in 1986 with "one suitcase of dreams, another of ambition and $900 dollars," reinventing a legacy has made Elliot one of today's greatest talents.

WHO knew strapless and shapeless can look great with the right attitude

AH! ICONIC pieces with draped front that got ground on the runway from S/S 2003 made popular by "Sex in the City"'s Kim Cattrall

ELEGANCE knows no ceasing "moss leaves," hue for S/S 2005 is her favorite colour, duh!

ELEGANT and tenant four-layer tiered with retro Lanvin jacket, pleating it at the side for asymmetric twist.

SINCE S/W 2004, Elliot has been fixated with pearls by wrapping them in black tulle.

FALL 2005's iconic look of gold tunic backed on black which made it to Lanvin's international ads

Simple business

The fashion business is not only ladder by bottomline and posing solutions but it must run business-like operations billions in the world economy. Unlike finance and industry, fashion is one of the few businesses that hinges on the right management of "creativity" and customers.

Despite that, in his emotional speech at the IHT's Fashion Luxury Conference, Elliot told 650 industry titans that included forward Armani, Sidney Toledano, Bertin Mourot, Dilvan Sozo, Jenny Shimbo Bertolet Ferragamo, Diego della Valle, Annie Simone, etc.: "For me, destiny is so simple. At the end of the day it is a swatch, a dress, a dressing room and a customer."

As Elliot himself said in this interview, "It is one thing to talk, it is another thing to do."

LIFESTYLE

Out on a fashion limb for children

Bernie Liu of Penshoppe puts his house of fashion—and contradictions—behind the Children's Hour cause

Text by Alice Y. Vergara
Photos by Jon Ulanes

BERNIE Liu, CEO of Golden ABC Inc. and chair of Children's Hour in Cebu, with presidential daughter Luli Arroyo and the Club Pen 2005 models during interview of donations in Cebu

BUSINESSMAN Bernie Liu, CEO of Golden ABC Inc., has always likened his company to a "house of contradictions." But the man behind the successful youth wear brand called Penshoppe was probably just being true to his character when he recently took over the reins of the Children's Hour (CH) in his native Cebu.

Since relaunching CH in Cebu several months ago, Liu has been tirelessly appealing to employees within and outside his company to donate part of their salaries—usually an hour or more—to help the province's poor cradle the phrase didn't fall on deaf ears, as he and presidential daughter Luli Arroyo recently attended to the turnover of the initial batch of donations at the Ayala Center Cebu.

Liu and the presidential daughter accepted the donations from heads of various donor companies, who represented their employees.

Donors ranged from employees of big firms and organizations such as M. Lhuillier Jewelers, Bank of the Philippine Islands, MATSU, CEU Cebu Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Ayala Center Cebu, to smaller, homegrown ones such as Gilroy's Bite Shop, that of Boss Vinh, Junior Master Dipper Inc., and Jolly and Fish. There were also individual donors, like Arroyo.

Before Liu took over, his predecessors led by Bob Gothong, vice chair of VFSEA, were able to raise P1.2 million. The challenge for 05, is to raise at least double the amount.

A typical donation is an hour's worth of wage, but organizers aren't stopping people from donating more. Certain firms such as Golden ABC even match the amount pooled by their employees. Such a gesture sets both as an incentive for client workers and as a challenge to competitor executives. It's not to break the monotonous, people at Penshoppe developer-cashier chain do, unless it's much to share.

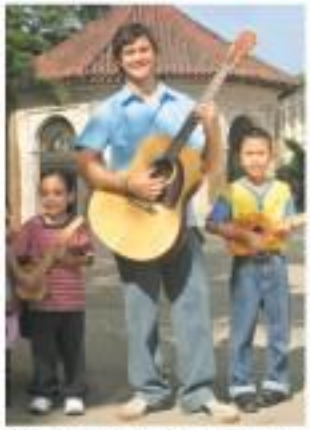
"It's easy to target business organizations for donations, but there's such a thing as donor fatigue," says Liu. "What makes Children's Hour unique and more appealing is its strategy to reach out to the poor ones."

Donations are channeled to the CH national office in Manila before they're allocated to different regions. Rural areas usually get more than what they give, says Liu, as most donors from Metro Manila aren't that particular as to where their donations end up.

The CH national

Out on a fashion limb for children

STEPPING GIRL. Ria Paredes, in a printed blouse and white maxi dress (P749) and black bead necklace and pendant (P199 a pair), and her young friends walk up the rise at Fuente Osmeña Park.



VISUAL LOVE SONG. Marian Goldwaldt and hers "handmaxi" seem poised to serenade a special girl. He wears a blue maxi's short sleeve polo shirt (P795), Dockmaster straight loose-fine pocket jeans with light wash and sand-blast finish (P1199) and black and moss green scuff in leather and twill (P249).

From page C2

board a conglomerate of, among others, Jaime Ezekiel de Ayala, Emily Abrera, Jose Ozeta Jr., Ramon del Rosario, Bishop Socrates Villegas and Alessandra Prieto-Romualdez. PDI pres. dent.

Soft spot

Ezekiel de Ayala, CEO national chair, couldn't have chosen a more ideal counterpart in Carlos. Saving a parent himself, Lin has always had a soft spot for charities for needy children. He and his wife Ailen have always been active in social projects, having imbibed the practice from his parents. It took him two months to finally say yes to head CIR.

Eye-candy

But tomorrow, in keeping with the Pen. shoppe spirit, need not be his-hers affairs. Adding some eye candy to the event were well-assisted Chris Pen 2005 models Gaga Domingo, Paco Guillermo, Ria Paredes, Steve Rangel and Mateo Trinidad. The gang of five gamely signed autographs, posed for pictures and appealed for hours on-the-spot donations from mall goers.

Except for lemonade, which had to go back to Manila on the same duet to attend to chores his commitments, the rest became the subject of a fashion shoot the next day featuring some of the brand's holiday wear. The models share the spotlight with children of Pembroke employees based in the province.

In Little Italy, you can be wholesome and still be fashionable. This belief, among other new values such as being sensitive yet disciplined, professionals-oriented pre-family-oriented, professional yet fun-loving a working girl, has turned his 18-year-old company into a house of contradictions.

"It's important for me to introduce these values," he says, "so that years from now the organization will conduct its affairs as its founders wanted it to be. We're here to make profits, but if in doing so we start to go against what we believe in, then hanging is long (we'll rather not)."

And part of Penshoppe and like-minded companies' investment in the future involves the needs of children today.

E-mail the author at emergencia@inquirer.com.ph

SHARE-A-COTTON. Vince Calderon, in a slate blue maxi's ringer tee (P549), Dockmaster regular straight-basic 5-pocket jeans and whiskers (P949), helps himself to free cotton candy.

WINNER BY A MILE. Marlou wears an emerald green men's ringer tee (P549), Dockmaster regular straight jeans with scrapping and cobalt detail (P899) and black Converse belt with stripes and ring buckle (P249).

CLASS ACT. Dawn Balagot passes for the right answer in a white short-sleeved textured blouse with smocking detail and fleece combination and side zipper (P695), Dockmaster bootcut stretch denim pants with angled back pockets (P899), light flex necklace in classic coloured string with antique silver pendant (P49), ladies' "I Love You" wristband (P49) and blue multi-pearl earrings with silver plated ribbons (P69).

LIFESTYLE

Never has the yearend seen the front and opinion pages mourning the loss of lives day after day, muting the sound of holiday celebration

Don't dwell on that empty space

LIFE-STYLED

(Section)

Simoun Sans Jones

THIS is one Christmas where we must exert extra effort to find the joy of the season simply because death came one after the other. Never has the yearend seen the front and opinion pages mourning the loss of lives day after day, muting the sound of holiday celebrations.

You're surrounded by the news of death near and far, and even of impending loss since you know of at least one relatively young person battling cancer to whom many have sprouted like an epidemic—no matter how ridiculous a cancer epidemic may sound.

It's a threatening reminder even to the hip and trying. What's up with the planet?

Nothing perhaps, it's just the usual cycle. Yet you must steel your heart and keep your heart still so that you catch whatever it is life is trying to tell you. How do you cope with the loss, and how do you relate to its blessings?

Sighing quiet and somnolent. It is ironic that the drift of the season is underlying the loss. The holiday mood is not euphoric; it is thoughtful and sober.

So how do you cope? So those hurt to roll with the punches, so you are instinctively enough to get back on your feet and walk on. In fact, there is no cracking up for it has said it is foolhardy to think that an experience could be duplicated or a loved one replaced.

One friend **Rye Hamanaka** even said in much of a dog when her **Shiffie Boo** (name) died a few weeks ago, accept and absorb the hurt and weed out the pain. After all, the heart—along with the rest of the body—gets replaced from bad ing.

There—arrive a new moment and live it. The cliché is true, we're just passing by, experiencing moments and people along the way but never really owning them indefinitely. We can't even retrieve our step—that happens only in the mind. There's only the demand, motion where time is concerned.

You can't go back, but you can move on. Master the birth to see only the fullness of the festival... not its emptiness. Don't dwell on that empty space.

Christmas, therefore, is seeing the moment and living it as if it were a blessing, because it is. Let you every moment be an unwrapped prayer. Merry Christmas!

We have a few friends to whom Christmas is an answered prayer. **JV** and **Angie Enriquez**, for instance, got the new joy with a Chinese girl named **Jasmine Francesca**; our executive assistant **Rina Lawsa** and husband **Randy** have a baby boy **Zeekariah**. We share their joy.

Love hurts

Talk about tearing us. Studio 23's and BBC Lounge's **Edge Pe-ñano** has a conservative way of healing a broken heart... he's compiled the year's love lowlife into a CD. He said that's his way of rejuvenating an otherwise unmendable feeling.

The result is a classy mix of broken and no-just hearts, heartbreakers and other wounds still to be played in March's clubs. Edge brought them fresh from the lo.

The compilation is dubbed Heartbreak Lounge, the Christmas gift of Metro Magazine to it broken-and-creative collaborators. It is, by turns, upbeat and rhythmic, instrumental and jazzy, melancholic and romantic—an invigorating succession of beats and feelings. When you listen to it, remember it is Edge's romantic journey.

Out-of-town dining

This long holiday break, pump up your weary mind and soul by driving out of the city. There are many places to dine in, chill out, or simply enjoy a change of scenery.

In San Pablo, Laguna, Tita and Putra Tuason have opened their quaint home and garden to diners who know only too well what the Tuason kitchen could whip up, specifically Chef Brad Pallender who's married to Nina Tuason.

As many know, Chef Brad first gained a following at Salud Bistro in Baguio. These days, Chef Brad's cuisine is only a short drive away. This time, instead of Asian Continental specialties, he's doing mainly favorites.

The day we were there, they served Jumbo, organic chicken breast, pinatasang sirloin and Adobong, among other dishes. In this new dining place called Cucina Salud, Chef Brad uses organic food.

The cool Tuason home is a visual feast in itself, with its intricate antique woodwork, chunks of which were taken from three old houses. It is in 1860—a rich tapestry of architecture, home furnishings and bric-a-brac culled from a lifetime of diverse interests in Filipiniana and nature.

Diners can even meander in the Tuasons' lush garden which Putra has developed the past 15 years using organic fertilizers. Rich in black bamboo, fruit trees and flowers, the garden maintains a rich character.

Dining at the Tuasons' Cucina Salud is like eating real lasing around in an old Filipino home, with the tables set up at quiet breezy corners. It had been impossible to the public until now, with Cucina Salud's opening.

While in the house, you can also shop for artworks by Quezon artists or the prize collection of former Czech Ambassador **Thea Arnold**, who settled down in Quezon. **Pio Ismael Earl-Rio Delegal**'s wood sculptures simply irresistible and bought a table centerpiece that combines wood and glass to display flowers and candles. Delegal's sculptures make a good counterpoint to minimalist interiors.

Delegal's studio is one of the cultural stops in Quezon which the Tuasons and **Ade Bautista** are helping develop. What they have is a culture lifestyle map that offers enough varied attractions to make it worth the drive to the south.

Apart from Cucina Salud, there's the Ugo Bagnai pottery workshop with cafe, **Ate Marawee**'s Café Kinabuhayan for life, Batahan trekkers and, of course, Villa Escudero where Ade Escudero and close friends opened his relatively new vast home, with its marvelous living room which is like a slice of a bustling field. It contains his motley collections of religious antiques and art pieces covering popular faiths—native, buddhist, Hindu gods, among others.

Since workaholics rejected the habit of hopping out of town for good eats, prices dining places have popped out in Tagaytay. It now has Sonsons, the popular ruins of the Calabarzon.

Artist **Pepe** Jose Pascual is often repeating the family home in dinery where I like to enjoy the home-cooked dishes of Pepe's mom **Blanina**...paella, roast beef, pinatasang sa tongue, chicken liver pate. The house sits in the first Pascual's vast garden. Pepe and brother **Tandy** are selling the place. Marina. It's in Morales Crossing, behind Bag of Beans. Call 09 184 110476.

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

PLEASE BE INFORMED THAT EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 24, 2004, SUN CELLULAR SHALL BE REDUCING ITS LOCAL SUN TO SUN MMS CHARGES FROM P5 TO P2.

CITIBANK executives Cecille Fuzanes, Micheline Fernandhany, Miss Agnes and Jenny Lucenes with Canon's Girlie Mariano and Patrick Cruz.

HEY, LET'S EAT. Citibank's Vanessa Fe, Quadreus Technologies general manager Jesus Tito and Fujitsu Philippines product manager for desktop and mobile computing Marisa Buenaseda.

EYE-CATCHING program host Angel Jacob.

FILIPINAS Skull Corp. vice president for retail Sammy de Guzman and Canon marketing manager Arnito Dumaog.

Consumer preference comes with a prize

SONY Philippines' May Benitez, Cata Meiner, Felix Ang and Andrea Villareal, Sony Philippines' Larry Serrano beauteli Cathay Pacific's Lyanne Ingay and Rhoda Cayanan, and Citibank's Jenny Lucenes.

FILA marketing manager Marty Albert with Binibining Antonette and Project Runway Philippines Pamela 3 champion.

WANGA Lucenallon, young Carlo Albert and socialite Gilberth Magbanua Gaerlan.

WE LOVE FILA. Chapel Sumsuwan with Ana A.S. Bisong and Collezioni's New York's Mandelson Saldana Brandon.

CITIBANK launched recently its "Most Preferred Brands Promotion" at the Little Italy of Greenbelt, Makati, in a program superbly hosted by stylist-cum-lifestyle Jacob Jacob.

Citibank's mega holiday save in the fun launch fashion plan Nina Aguas, country business manager for global consumer group; cards business director Micheline Fernandhany; marketing director Cecille Fuzanes; and cards marketing vice president Jenny Lucenes.

"That promotion is the way of rewarding the cardholders for their loyal support," said Micheline. Being voted as Asia's Most Preferred Bank validates the fact that we at Citibank continue to be successful in living up to our customers."

The promo gave Citibank cardholders a chance to make a certain amount of purchases through their cards to win top consumer preferred brands. The promo lasts until Jan. 31, 2005.

Congratulating Citibank were their top executives from Asia's other preferred countries' brands.

Prizes at stake? A brand new Mercedes Benz C-200 Kompressor Saloon; a Canon Powershot Pro 1 Digital Camera with Canon Pixma IP5000 photo printer; a cool P 100,000 swarth of Hallyuan cash; a Philips 1,000-inch 942DC 1:43-inch Sony Projection TV; an Apple iPod 40G with dock and Apple Cube promotion plan; a Hewlett Packard iPaq 2715, trips for two to Hong Kong via Cathay Pacific; a Panasonic Home Theater SC-PT500; and a Samsung E800 mobile phone.

How can anyone not take a chance in winning any of these goodies? I know! I'll give it a shot.

A recent Asian survey showed Citibank ranking first in the bank/investment/investment service category, and 27th among the 1,000 most preferred brands in Asia.

Spirits of the season

Cocktails are come cool these days, pairing gin, dark before you could list as eyelash. Manila's bar-hopping and hot woks having out and the chance to experiment first hand the evening, to "try" drink of martinis and cocktails at the swinging Red Box Karaoke in Greenbelt 5, Ayala Center.

Synonymous with sophistication, allure and delicious decadence, cocktails and martinis hold a well-recognized in social history.

At Red Box, the bar was all about the new delightful concoction of premium British Whiskey and the intriguing and interesting Liquid Tea. The bar also had imaginative cocktails known the world over, such as the Flaming Lamborghini, Kamikaze, Cactus Blanket, and the naughty Sex on the Beach. Sensations, which I just couldn't resist so had another round of.

Red Box Karaoke's resident operations

APPLAUSE! APPLAUSE! The Acoustic Mixers College HS Pep Squad.

EDUCATION goes hand with crowd-pleasing fun as Philip John Belding (right) artist shows images of wisdom on how to communicate wishes with his partner Lyn Belding.

PRIDE wives Liguid Tan Martini Angel Johnson with popular young couple Vicky Wilson and her husband Robert Barrera.

TEMPIE Gutierrez of Manual magazine and Miss Basics of Negros Occ. Marian.

GIVE us a bit night of delightful cocktail drinks like the Lychee Martini, Kamikaze, Flaming Lamborghini and Sexberian.

FILA DUELLE. Fila's EVP and general manager Cris Albert with Binibini Antonette, brand endorser and Butch Albert, Fila president.

Without batting an eyelash

Maurice Arcache

Photos by Alex Vaz Hugnet and Rodlak Mitz

Interviewed by Maurice Arcache, Alex Vaz Hugnet and Rodlak Mitz, managers James "Cocktail" Aguilar, gamely provided a quick instructional on the basic spirits and equipment one would need to whip up in one's home bar. He also generously shared all of us with some bottle flipping, before finally making sure we tried some of the mean concoctions.

Then Philip John Belding, the guest chef, educated us on cocktail and food pairings. Chef John is the CIA chef of the legendary Pan International Wine Club, which just happens to be the biggest wine seller in Asia. And lingo.

His after-lecture lucid knowledge of wine, I can't wait for another round of martinis and cocktails.

Hmm! dinner and drinks? No problem. And Ben Kuroki has the spirits to keep our spirits high, palangges.

Fila's new last

Even from a distance, I knew exactly where I was going as I looked at the blinding red color of the boutique of the world-renowned Fila at Robinsons Galleria, unforgettable.

After we were welcomed by Fila's Cris and Butch Albert and Ana Bisong, we were treated to a phenomenal performance from Mariian College HS Pep Squad, which drew the crowds like bees to the honeycomb.

The new Fila boutique is the latest in a string of 20 some stores that are set to open nationwide by 2005, pansinin.

"The key to our expansion plans is finding the right investment partners for our Filabusiness. We are currently entertaining queries from strategic partners who would like to own a Fila franchise," said Cris Albert, executive vice president of Sport Life Inc., the exclusive Philippine licensee of Fila.

"Depending on the size of the boutique and its potential sales, an investment of at least P2 million for three years guarantees regular income earnings of 20 percent annum starting on year one. This excludes the construction or renovation of the boutique, Fila deals inventory and administrative and operational expenses. The investment is returned after three years or can be renewed."

"Sport Life manages the store, pays for the overhead and takes care of the inventory. It's a simple franchise setup. Our strategic partner invests money and Sport Life runs the business. You definitely can't go wrong with this location," said Albert.

Those interested to obtain a Fila franchise may call Stella Ang at 9921-471 or 9921-477.

A fashion show had preceded Binibini Antonette and Project Models, the Philippines' leading fun formula divas, showing off the latest Fila active lifestyle collection.